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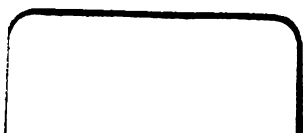
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THE RED SWAN'S NECK

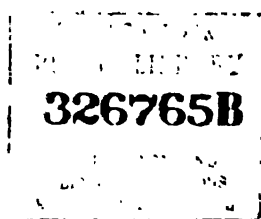
A TALE OF THE NORTH
CAROLINA MOUNTAINS

BY
DAVID REED MILLER



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THE RED SWAN'S NECK

CHAPTER I

MORE OR LESS RELEVANT

"TH' boy'd better been t' home savin' his mammy all this trouble o' huntin' him," growled Snags Groucher, an aboriginal crone whose one protruding tooth was her only claim to immortality.

"W'at ye talkin' about?" inquired the Rev. William Watchcob, a grey-haired mountaineer preacher, who had finished his "preachin'," and stood talking to a group of parishioners at the church door. He was somewhat out of sorts, notwithstanding his late lurid dissertation on original sin. The rain falling in gentle rhythm without held the few jarring members within doors.

"I be talkin' erbout Gyp, that 'bominable wee Stybright cub who's allus givin' his daddy and mammy trouble," Snags replied with unnecessary glow in her sharp, resolute eyes.

"It hain't Gyp, it's his daddy that's a doin' it all," snapped Judy Gans, "gettin' drunk an' chasin' his wife an' boy out'n th' house! That's th' ole man: I know him!"

"Ef th' ole man do get drunk an' beller aroun' th' house, it's his own house, hain't it? Ef a

man can't do as he pleases t' home, what's th' use, by goll!"

The philosophy came from Snags.

"I'd jes like t' see a man do as he pleases about my house!" and Judy Gans pitched her nose a few inches into the air. "I'd like t' see him comin' home drunk, a howlin' an' a swearin' like ole Guy Stybright!" and her mouth snapped shut with an emphasis that was ominous.

"Considerin' that yer an ole maid th' pint's not well put," and Snags grinned sarcastically across toward Terbaccy Tom.

"Same t' you, Snags!" retorted Judy; "ye'r not only a glowerin' ole maid yersel; but no man was ever fool enough t' ast ye!"

"An' Gyp ran away, did he, 'cause his daddy came home drunk," interposed the preacher, desiring to allay the rising hostilities between the lambs of his flock.

"I'm thinkin' he didn't run fur; jes hiked off into the mountings an' hid, an' has his mammy lookin' atter him an' worrit t' death fear o' him bein' lost fer good," was Judy's reply to the minister.

"He's an annoyin' cuss, anyway," interpolated Terbaccy Tom, who had been outwitted on several occasions by the wide-awake little fellow. "Th' child hain't afeared o' his daddy's much as he likes t' give trouble."

"Who wouldn't run from a drunken daddy? Th' devil hain't yit invented a wuss critter than

a drunk man. He's hell's best crap, 's fur as my obserwation goes," and the nose of Judy Gans took another ominous tilt.

"Well, all I haster say is, ef ole Stybright wantster git drunk 'e can git as drunk as 'e's a mindter, fer all me; an' th' drunker the better," and Snags ducked her head toward Judy with an emphasis which had little effect on that worthy.

"Th' fuller th' funnier," laughed Sykes Snickerby.

"The drunker 'e gits th' sooner weuns'll git rid of him. He's a blight on th' community, like a bit of carrion by the roadside," Judy ventured with a humanitarian grip on the situation.

"'E's mighty poor goods t' keep in stock, an' that's true for ye all," echoed the preacher. "Nobody hain't a realizin' nothin' off'n him, an' 'e hain't no blessin' t' nobody. But there's lots o' space fer him t' crawl up an' git good. It's a long way up to th' first limb, an' ye better be tryin' t' gin him a lift 'stead o' pullin' him down."

Judy Gans gave her little round nose another wink: "W'en 'e comes into my house a smellin' like a corpse, woe t' him, I say; woe t' him!"

"An' what 'u'd you do?" Snags ventured.

"It's a mighty poor fireplace what can't keep a kittle bilin'."

"D' ye mean ye'd scald th' old soak?"

"I'd do it, or die a tryin'."

"Isn't a man's mouth his own, an' his thrapple,

too? an' ef he wants ter put pisen into it, hain't he a right to? An' I'm th' gal t' gin him a help at it," and Snags became quite polemic in her attitude, as she snapped her red eyes and blinked toward the preacher.

"Snags, ye'd better be still. Th' devil gits all the fool fellers what commit suicide whether by hangin', drownin' or th' drink route. An' there be people what had better be still about their betters, 'stead o' givin' him a boost downward by encouragin' him," replied the sky pilot insinuatingly.

There was a titter in the group, and Snags' eye blazed on the preacher: "Ye talk lak a saint; but yer hain't no more piety than a duck," and she whisked across the aisle, sat down on a bench and glowered on her spiritual adviser.

"I know Gyp didn't run off, 'cept he had to," the preacher continued, oblivious of the gloom that settled over the face of his irascible parishioner. "He's a bright boy; but he can't stand the fury of his drunken daddy. He's a soul in him that's wuth a lookin' atter; a soul what'll live longer'n these here mountings an' outshine th' sun. He looks a langwidge out'n them eyes o' his'n what's wuth a listenin' to. That boy's gwinter live when the sun has no more fire in it than a wet sponge."

"Well, an' won't th' hull batch o' us do th' same, even ol' snappy critters like Judy Gans an' fool preachers who think they'r smart?" The voice of Snags sounded like the tearing of a

piece of sheeting as she delivered herself of these felicitous observations.

"Th' pahson's cogs is gettin wobbly," ventured Jim Habor, grinning irreverently, and coming to the rescue of Snags.

"Needs a hunk o' pone. Give him a slab f'm yer bag, Snags," haw-hawed Terbaccy Tom, whose dislike for the preacher was only exceeded by his love for whiskey.

"Er a chaw o' terbaccy," sarcastically drawled the Groucher woman, as she deposited a wad from her own mouth on the church floor.

"Er a pinch o' th' tickler," added Jay Grimp, as he took a snuff-box from his pocket, helped himself and returned it to its place.

"Or a sip o' mounting dew," tittered Jim Habor, the worst reprobate in the neighborhood.

"Rail away, ye heathen," retorted the preacher, as he cocked his eye toward Habor, Grimp and Terbaccy Tom. "When th' old Red Man with th' horns and barbed tail comes t' North Car'liny, ye'll git what's comin' to ye. Meantime ye'd better be out helpin Seloe Stybright find her lost boy."

"She'll git no help f'm me," jerked Snags Groucher, as she twisted herself off the bench and went out of the building.

"An' she'll git none f'm me," echoed Grimp.

"Nothin' doin' here!" snuffed Terbaccy Tom.

"What's a hurtin' you heathen that ye can't help a poor woman in trouble?" Judy Gans inquired.

"That's w'at I'd like ter know," interposed Sykes Snickerby, "I'd help a nigger out'n a hog waller, ef he couldn't get out hisself," and he beamed on Judy as if an aureole were already on his brow.

"D'ye wanter know why I'm doin' nothin'?" Tom replied, "I'll tell yer. Th' hull batch o' them Stybrights is Union. I'm C'nfed'rate an' agin that gang."

"Well, Tom, if I'd a neighbor in trouble I'd help her out, by goll, no matter what flag she was a marchin' under."

"Give us yer claw on that," said Snickerby, as he jumped forward and clutched the hand of his friend Judy.

"An' I say so, too," added the minister; "that's a mighty good gopill, Judy. Humanity's bigger'n a flag."

But Terbaccy Tom was not there to benefit by the observation. He and Jim Habor had followed Snags into the woods; and Grimp soon went out to keep them company.

"Rain's over, Judy; come away, you and Snickerby. We'll help th' woman. But ye needn't t' worry about Gyp;" said the Rev. William Watchcob, "he's hid somewhar. He'll be back t' th' house soon as th' old man leaves. That's Gyp's way. He dreads that daddy o' his'n, but he loves his mammy, an' hain't a runnin' away f'm her. Maybe he's t' home now. We'll go see; come along."

CHAPTER II

A CLUSTER OF AZALEAS

A CLUMSY cart, drawn by a slow, swaggering ox, jolted over the gravelly road that wound over the North Carolina mountains. The laurels on the hillsides looked like drifts of snow. The numberless shades of green announced that the woodlands were awake from their wintry repose. Under the low-branched pines the grey of a little stream flashed in pleasant fellowship with the leafy canopy that roofed it over. But neither the stolid ox nor the drowsy driver gave the least heed to a small sprite of humanity, the lost Gyp, who stood timorously by the side of the rivulet with his eyes on the drunken driver. In his hand he held a cluster of flaming azaleas so large that he was half hidden by their glowing splendors. The heavy cart bumped slowly past and went on its way.

The lad was bare-footed and bare-headed. His trousers were held in place by pieces of twine, while his thin, brown shirt was open at the throat and swung loose, revealing a breast tanned almost the color of the earth beneath his feet. His face was a sweet, pathetic one, such as any artist would love to paint, yet one to which childish

sorrow had paid many an unwelcome visit. His dark eyes were lustrous and beautiful, his cheeks ruddy and his teeth like flakes of chrysolite. There he stood like a frightened fawn, screened by the azaleas, gazing with those sweet, tender eyes of his on his drunken father as he drove around the bend of the road and disappeared.

The little fellow so feared his father that he would hide behind the rocks and trees or under the rhododendrons or in the thickets of elders when his unnatural parent came brawling home from his revels in the mountains. There he would wait and watch until his father left the house, or until his mother came in search of him, when he would hide his face in her faded skirts and whine:

"Maw, why be he so bad to weuns?"

And the mother, taking her frightened child in her arms, would point far up the mountain to a little stream that fell over the rocks and say:

"See th' stream?"

"Yes, maw."

"Up there, mah child, is th' devil o' th' still; an' th' devil o' th' still be in him."

So it came about that to the mind of little Gyp there was something awful associated with those heights. He knew not the meaning of the word "still." It might be some poisonous vine, some ferocious wild beast, or a terrible giant who ruled the solitudes; but whatever it was, he knew

that it made his father ugly and cruel. And when on this bright May morning he burst into the house and fell cursing on the floor, the lad fled like a frightened fawn to the mountains. The day slowly passed, and as he came not to his home when the evening shadows fell, the mother could scarcely contain herself in her distress.

"Won't mah boy nuvver come back t' me? He's mah life, mah heav'n. O Gyp!" and she wrung her hands in her grief as she looked unsuccessfully out through the door upon the crooked mountain paths. The night came on and still he did not return, and with the darkness came a deeper gloom in her soul. She pressed her hands to her bosom and sobbed:

"Mah heart, mah heart! O God hain't mah wee boy nuvver comin' back t' me?" She held her throbbing breast and listened for his footsteps; but no sound came out of the night. She went to the door and gazed into the mighty silences, but the darkness had no answer. She ran to her husband, who had long since returned with his ox-cart, and lay in a drunken slumber. But all she could get from him was a grunt of unconsciousness. He would not be aroused. She turned away with an aching heart, took down the lantern from the rafter, and, touching its candle with a lighted splinter, drew her shawl about her and passed into the all-pervasive pathos of the night.

The dallying winds played with the fringe of

her tattered shawl and fanned the bulb of her lantern as she took the trail which she knew her boy had often taken. Deep in a cool ravine, where, in the full blaze of noon, scarcely a ray of sunshine penetrated, Gyp had made for himself a miniature farm and playhouse with make-believe fields and barns. Twigs, laid on the ground, served for fences, and brown and white pebbles were herds of cattle. Acorns were stacks of hay, and the mountain stream was to him a great flowing river where fairies played and boats were wrecked and armies drowned. Here the boy would spend long hours dreaming dreams which older men have dreamed and wiser heads have cherished.

Would she find him here, here in this retreat now so dark that the night and silence were oppressive? Her lantern threw spectral lights about her, which, like wraiths and phantoms, seemed to whisper in her ears: "We know, but we won't tell!"

Slowly her little star moved up the ravine twinkling among the trees, and as she went she peered into the shadows clucking the solitary word, "Gyp!" But no answer came.

She swung around a gnarled pine, leaped down over its crooked roots, and came to the playground. She examined every nook and corner; but her boy was not there. Here were the "mansion," and the "barns," and the "cattle," and the noisy "river," but there was not the slightest

indication that he had been there during the day. Her heart sank like lead. Her one hope had been that he had fallen asleep in this familiar place and had not awakened when the night came on. She called, still hoping that he might be somewhere near:

"Gyp! Gyp!"

But there was no answer.

Then louder, with more of anguish in her voice:

"G-Y-P! G-Y-P!"

She set down her lantern and listened, as one might listen for the last speech of the dying. The blood tingled through her veins. Never did mortal ear strive to catch the mysteries of the night with greater solicitude. But the darkness swallowed up her cry and gave her nothing in return. She lost all fear of the night and the place, and putting her hands to her mouth she fairly shrieked into the black and remorseless night the name of her lost boy.

The cry of a startled bird and the flutter of wings crashing through the branches were the only response.

One star still glimmered on her horizon. She remembered that her boy had sometimes gone to the opposite side of the mountain-valley where the Falls of Okaluna flung themselves from the dark brow of Thunder Cliff and the Red Swan's Neck lay under the stars. It was a long distance; but it was hope; it was her only one; and weak and trembling, with the perils of the night about

her, she seized her lantern, clutched her shawl at her throat and hastened down the trail. She would look into her home as she passed. Maybe her husband would go with her. Maybe the lad had returned. She pushed open the door. All was silence and darkness. With her glimmer of a candle she searched the room. She went to Gyp's bed in the corner. It was empty. Her husband still lay in his drunken stupor. She shook him; but it was like shaking a dead animal. Stupid and sullen and sodden, he gave no heed.

"Wak' up, wak' up mah man! Poor Gyp's lost!" and she shook him again; but he only rolled, pulpy and unresisting, like the body of a dog newly dead. She caught him by the beard and shook him, as she held the light before his face, till he began to blink and grunt.

"Stybright, th' boy's gone! 'E's lost! wak' up, wak' up!"

He opened his rheumy eyes and stared a moment as one dazed. Then a frown darkened his face as he snarled:

"Watcher mean, Seloe, 'sturbin' mah rest?"

"Gyp's out on th' mountings. 'E's lost! O Guy, our poor boy's lost!"

He fell back on his bed grunting: "Good rid'nce. 'T's only a trick. (hic.) G'way wum-man an' lemme sleep."

What use was he in that awful hour, he with his swaggering limbs, muddled brain and brutal tongue? With a silent appeal to the pity of

God she replenished her light and faced the darkness once more.

In the solitudes a lantern glimmered like a firefly in the mountain pass. She hailed it and it came slowly toward her, and, as she held her own light above her head, its rays fell full upon the faces of Snags Groucher and Jim Habor. They were her enemies, but sorrow softens our asperities. She looked into the face of the Groucher woman:

"Oh, Snags, have yer seen him?"

"Seen who?" she answered contemptuously.

"Mah boy, mah lost boy, Gyp!"

"Naw; an' I don't care to. Mebby th' little beast is burrowin' under a stump, among th' rocks like a woodchuck."

Seloe overlooked the insult and answered: "Oh, Snags, I know you don't like me or him. Mebby it's our fault. But if you'n Habor'll help me find him, I'll be yer frien' forever."

"To th' divil with yer friendship. An hour's huntin' in th' dark's too big a price t' pay fer it. I'd ruther block up th' hole into which th' varmint's crawled, an' let him rot there."

The desperate mother clutched the bail of her lantern until her finger nails sunk into her hands. The fire flashed from her eyes. She could have leaped upon the Groucher woman and torn her to pieces.

"D' ye mock me?" she hissed.

"Yer sniffin' hain't a 'sturbin' me. Yer brat's

better lost than found. W'y don't yer git th' preacher, er old Judy or Sykes Snickerby to ketch yer runaway colt?"

Seloe set down her lantern and leaped upon the woman and bore her to the earth, when Habor interfered, threw the Stybright woman to one side, and taking Snags by the arm, said:

"Come away, Snags, afore she eats yer," and they disappeared in the darkness.

Seloe picked up her lantern and turned on her way wounded and weak because of the compassionless hearts and insulting lips. With a soul torn by their inhumanity, by the sodden indifference of her husband and the loss of her boy, she pursued her way, heartsore and trembling, into the sympathetic silence of the great mountains. At last she turned an angle in the road and the spray of the Falls drifted into her face.

She called her boy, but the noise of the falling water swallowed up her cry. A zigzag trail led to the overhanging ledge, beneath which was a narrow shelf of rock. The perils of the ascent were doubled by the darkness. The stones were slippery with the spray; but, nothing daunted, she toiled up the hazardous path. Great boulders, fallen from the cliff in some primeval time, frowned upon her. She passed a cave, dark and terrifying, and a little beyond it a pile of rocks was bunched like some Druidic altar. It was a gruesome place even at noonday.

She returned, entered the cave and examined

every part of it. She searched the dark, mysterious altar, climbed the rocks, and sought the recesses under the crags. She explored the menacing shelf to its beetling brink, and, with her arm thrown about a friendly tree, held her lantern over the edge and peered down into the abyss. But there was nothing in all those fierce, wild heights to give the mother the least whisper of hope. Nature had sealed both her heart and her lips. Hope turned to stone in the soul of the mother, and Despair seemed her last and only friend. She threw her hands into the air and shrieked:

"O mah God, mah God! Where is mah darlin' child?"

A mist swam before her eyes, her knees gave way, the lantern dropped from her nerveless hand, she fell in a faint, and compassionate night closed the vision.

A mountaineer, passing along the road far down in the valley, heard a wild shriek, and looking up saw that the mountain was on fire.

CHAPTER III

THE CALL OF THE CONCH SHELL

THE drunken Stybright awoke to find his home deserted. There was no fire on the hearth. There was no fragrance of the morning meal, no sound of foot-fall on the floor. He raised himself on his elbow, rubbed his eyes, and gazed about him. His wife had not occupied her place by his side. He looked down into the corner where Gyp was accustomed to sleep, but the bed was undisturbed. Then he called:

"Seloe! Gyp?"

Only the sound of his voice came back to him.

He leaped to the floor and looked about the room. Everything remained as when, in drunken imbecility, he threw himself upon the bed the previous evening.

"Powerful strange!" he ejaculated, rubbing his eyes.

He opened the door and gazed into the forests and off upon the hills. There was only the calm of the morning to greet his vision. Again he called:

"Seloe! Gyp?"

The mountains gave no answer and the woodlands were mute.

CALL OF THE CONCH SHELL 17

"Powerful strange!" he repeated, shaking his shaggy head.

He was anxious now and fully awake. Confusing thoughts perplexed him. What did it mean? He went up to the cliff that hung above his home, and, putting his brawny hands over his eyes, peered inquiringly up and down the narrow valley and off upon the slopes of the hills. Only the peace of nature was there. Then he called into the dreamy beauty of the morning:

"Selo-o-o-e! S-e-l-o-o-e!"

The hills seemed to mock him and to fling back into his face the name of the woman he had so cruelly wronged.

If ever man was thoroughly alarmed it was Guy Stybright. He feared that his wife had left him forever. Confusion took possession of his brain. The very thought of being abandoned by wife and child because of his inhumanity to them filled him with unutterable dismay. He knew it would be serving him right; but the thought of it was anguish to him. He started down the mountain scarcely knowing where he was going or what he intended to do, yet whimpering as he went:

"Mah wumman an' mah wee lad gone?"

Once more he examined the house. Then he walked all around it. He went down the path to the road, passed under the rhododendrons and searched the elder thickets, until, sobbing like a child, he cried:

"O Seloe, come back, come back mah wumman, come back t' me, O Seloe!"

The clouds rolled from Thunder Cliff where the lantern fell and the fire still burned. Down in the valley and off upon the hillsides the smoke from neighboring chimneys told him that the morning meal was being prepared. At last into his feverish brain came the confused scene of the previous evening. Gradually it dawned upon him that Seloe had stood by his bedside with an anxious face and told him something about little Gyp; but what it was he could not now remember. He recalled her plea for help, and how he had repulsed her. It all came back to him like some satanic dream. And now his Seloe was lost, maybe dead—dead, if not by his own hand, by his own inhumanity!

He ran to the house, seized his hat and, without waiting for a bite of food, fled to the nearest neighbor, where he told his pathetic story.

It was not long until runners were speeding here and there along the mountain paths arousing their neighbors. The whole community joined in the search. Every cabin was deserted. Never did the woman with her candle search more diligently for the lost coin, or the shepherd for the wayward sheep, than did these sympathetic highlanders for their neighbor and her child.

It was arranged that if the lost were found three prolonged blasts on a conch shell would be blown from the crags above the Stybright

home; and many a time during the long day were the eyes of the searchers turned to the cliff, while listening ears waited, yet waited in vain, for the longed-for sound. Again and again the searchers crossed each other's paths and exchanged anxious inquiries.

Judy Gans and Sykes Snickerby were always together, more diligent in searching for each other's affections than for the lost mother and her son. The parson with his snow-white hair was a conspicuous figure in the shadowy defiles. Jay Grimp and Terbaccy Tom were plotting how they could best plant the Confederate flag over all that community. Habor and the Groucher woman were already suggesting the torch and the stiletto to accomplish that end.

"Did yer see anywhere a wumman an' a wee lad in yer travels?" Stybright inquired, despairingly, of a lone horseman who came down the graveled road, little caring at that hour whether the Union stood or fell. The reins were loose on the neck of the shambling steed, while the rider sat with his face in a book oblivious of anyone's presence until he heard the pitiful voice by his side.

"Heavens!" ejaculated the startled man, as he looked into Stybright's woebegone countenance. "You frightened me most out of my wits."

"I've lost mah wumman an' mah boy," cried Stybright, the tears running down his cheeks.

"I saw nothing of them. Oh, sir, did you see

the terrible fire which last night filled the heavens above the Falls of Okaluna?"

"A fire? An' did yer see no pale, tired wumman?"

"Only the fire. It was the most terrible sight I ever witnessed. I stood there fascinated, and watched it for more than an hour. Huge volumes of smoke, flushed with yellow flame, raced over the brilliantly illuminated plateau, while the soaring pines, wrapped in fire—"

"Watcher mean by them words? Did yer see no wumman?"

"I saw the awful mountain, and it seemed to be in volcanic eruption. Tongues of fire darted into the air and vanished. Webs of flames were flung heavenward—"

"Listen to me!"

"—as if torn by invisible hands from the blazing looms of some horrible inferno—"

"O stranger, stranger! Did yer see—"

"Sounds of distant thunder boomed from the heights as boulders were rent by the heat or burned-off pines fell with a crash."

Stybright was becoming furious. The utter indifference of the man to the cry of his heart fairly enraged him. His teeth ground together. But the rider, carried away with the remembrance of the gorgeous spectacle, held to his bombastic narrative, heedless of the anguish of the soul that gazed so pleadingly into his own:

"The heavens were lit up. The vast dome hid

its stars and flashed back the furious paroxysms that beat against it like the tides of a fiery sea. The darkness recoiled on itself, and beyond the arena of supernatural light the night grew sullen and ominous—

"Just as I be—"

"—as if infuriate nature were about to vent her anger upon the moaning earth and—"

"Pull it f'm its hoss an' pitch th'nfernal thing into th' ditch!" hissed the exasperated Stybright, as he grasped the heartless rider by the arm, pulled him from his horse, flung him down by the side of the road and leaped upon him.

"Ye'll triful 'ith a desperate man, wull yer?" and he clutched his throat with the grip of a steel claw and shook him as a terrier might a rat. "Wus there a wumman an' a boy near th' fire? Ansur afore I kill ye!"

"I heard a w-w-oman's v-v-voice in the f-f-fire," gurgled the prostrate horseman.

Stybright waited for no more. He leaped from his victim and ran in the direction of Thunder Cliff, the prey of the worst apprehensions. He was pitiable to behold; haunted with fear, aghast at the conjuring of what might have happened as he saw the smoke of the conflagration still hanging above the mountain like a mighty parachute.

Exhausted with his running, faint from hunger and grief, overwhelmed with a sense of his own guilt in the matter, he fell upon his knees and

with tears and sobs cried to God to come to his rescue and help him find his lost Seloe and Gyp. It was the wail of a frenzied soul. "Give back, give back mah wife an' wee boy, an' I'll dig my whiskey still f'm th' earth an' throw it intil the catarac' of Lindeno! An' mah drinkin' 'll go with it. Help me, O God, an' I'll quit."

No sound of conch shell broke the stillness of the day. Along the trails and in the deep defiles they searched. Amid jungles deep and the fissures of mighty rocks, where vultures soar and plunging torrents foam; in dens where spotted serpents flash their forked tongues; wherever mortal form might hide or human corpse might lie those faithful mountaineers sought the lost.

The shadows climbed slowly up the peaks and pushed the sunshine from the summits. Sty-bright saw that the dreaded night would overtake him before he reached the Falls. His fears were swifter than his feet, and his heart was like lead as he wound his way toward the smoking mountain. As he passed his home he waited for a little food to strengthen him, for the worst was yet to come. He pushed open the door, and stood there a moment amazed. There sat his wife and child by the fireless chimney, their wide-open eyes turned inquiringly toward him. He rushed into his wife's arms crying:

"O mah God, Seloe, Seloe!"

It was then the conch shell sounded from the cliff.

CHAPTER IV

BEHIND THE CATARACT

"SELOE, Seloe!" Stybright crooned as he patted his wife on the cheek in his wonderful delight. He could scarcely reconcile himself to the joy of her presence. Seloe was startled at the unusual effusiveness. She could scarcely believe her own eyes. She feared her husband was losing his mind. It was a revelation. She knew not what to make of it, while Gyp looked on from a safe distance, ready to take to the woods on the slightest provocation.

"Mah dear Seloe!" crooned the happy man as he frisked about her, almost beside himself with joy. He took her in his arms and rained kisses upon her pale cheeks. Gyp thought it about time to break for the elder thicket; but meeting some neighbors at the door returned. Stybright in his exuberance gave no heed to their coming.

"Whar ye been, Seloe? Gyp, whar ye been? Weuns been a huntin' youns; an' I been a prayin'! Whar ye been?"

Seloe looked at him in amazement. All this from the man whom, only a few hours ago, she had left drunken in his bed with brutal curses on his lips! And this incoming of the neighbors with

strange, inquiring looks! She gazed from one to the other, and said:

"W'at's been a happenin'?"

"Th' Lord bless ye, Seloe!" fervently ejaculated the Rev. William Watchcob; "won't ye tell th' people whar ye been all this time, an' w'at yer been a doin', you an' th' lad?"

"Not till th' world ends, an' har'ly then, kin I tell ye th' happenin' o' las' night. But I've foun' mah boy, an' that's blessin's a plenty."

"But, Seloe," entreated the eager husband who sat gazing into her face, "weuns been a huntin' an' a scourin' all th' hills fer ye. An' I been most like a wild animal, jes plum crazy fer ye."

"Well, Guy, ye know th' boy was lost, an' somethin' tol' me t' go way off to th' Thunder Cliff an' I went."

"Not alone, Seloe; yer didn't go alone through all th' night far off to th' Cliff, Seloe, not in th' dark, did yer?"

"I shorely did. Tired an' broken an' mos' dead I went, up th' face o' th' cliff, over th' slipp'ry rocks an' leaves an' moss, slippin' an' fallin' an' cryin'—"

"Maw, w'y didn't ye call an' I'd a cum t' ye?" Gyp tenderly inquired.

"Mah boy, I called till I thought mah heart would burst right thar; all alone in th' wild night thar I cried. An' I fell faintin' t' th' groun', an' th' lantern set fire t' th' leaves. It was that cry that waked ye, Gyp."

"O Seloe!" gasped Stybright as he seized her hand, "how near I cum t' losin' ye!"

"Yes, paw," shouted Gyp, aroused at the remembrance of the peril in which they both were; "maw, she been a mos' burnded up, an' I said, 'Quick, maw, dish-a-way,' an' tugged at her skirts t' waken her. I hollered an' hollered an' maw woke up, an' th' fire was a droppin' f'm th' big pines an' a creepin' in th' grass, an' hissin' in th' trees lak a storm, an' I tho't we be both roasted, an' maw saw th' fire an' saw me, an' clasped me t' her breast an' screamed so's I know God heer'd."

"W'at did yer do, Gyp; how'd ye git out o' th' fire?"

"I took maw by th' hand, 'quick, maw! behind th' Falls! I hollered, an' we run'd behind th' fallin' water, an'—"

"Ye don't mean t' tell us, boy, that yer went under th' Falls of Okaluna when th' fire was a ragin'?" spoke up Judy Gans, who had been listening spellbound.

"That's jes w'at we did, 'cept not under but back o' th' Falls," answered Seloe. "Thar be a mighty cave in thar 'ith damp leaves an' a bad smell; an' nobody but jes Gyp an' th' chipmunks knowed it was thar. An' thar we stayed till mornin', th' rocks makin' a roof above us, th' Falls porin' an' a porin' an' a roarin' all night in front of us, an' although all th' mountings was afire we wus safe, Gyp an' me."

"Maw, wusn't it awful?"

"It was th' mercy o' Gawd!" reverently exclaimed the Rev. William Watchcob. "It was sure th' mercy o' Gawd!"

"I might a killed ye, Seloe, 'ith mah drinkin', an' I been a mos' crazy all day f'r fear I had," was the trembling acknowledgment of Stybright. "I might a killed ye 'cause I been so bad t' ye," and he rubbed his nose with his bandanna and gave a little snuff that sounded like a sob.

"Aw, ye been a doin' nuthin', you good ole feller," and Seloe reached over and patted him forgivingly on the cheek. "You was jes a takin' yer rest while I been a huntin' weunses little boy."

"O but I was drunk, Seloe, I was drunk, drunk!" he answered quickly, taking her thin white hand in his and stroking it soothingly as a child might the back of a favorite tabby. Then looking around at Gyp, he said:

"Gyp, whar ye been, mah boy, when yer mammy been a huntin' ye?"

"W'y, paw, I jest went t' th' Falls t' see things, an' as I stood thar a lookin' up t' th' mounting top, I wunnered w'at lay beyent it. I saw th' sun a settin' behin' th' cliff, an' I tho't, maybe, it was still a sittin' thar, an' I clum up t' see w'at it looked like w'en it was a doin' nothin'. I tho't it might be a fairy place 'ith purty things an' bu'ful faces, an' I wunnered if there wus houses an' w'at tha looked like, an' w'at sort o' creeters lived in 'em, an' w'at cur'us things I'd see thar. An', paw, I didn't know it was wrong

to climb up an' find out. So I clum up among th' rocks an' sticks an' jaggars an' pisen vines, wet moss an' ferns an' slippery things, an' w'en I got thar, w'y paw, it's jes like this side o' th' mounting, jes dirt an' trees an' things. The sun wasn't settin' thar at all. It was jes a goin' on an' on; an' I stood an' looked at its big face as it rested on th' aidge o' th' furdest mounting. I looked at it, with it's big yaller face like a punkin, an' it seemed as if it wanted t' say something t' me, an' I up an' tol' it t' go on an' say w'at it had a mind ter. But it wouldn't say nuthin', jes sot thar a gapin'. Then it sneaked down behin' th' hill. An', paw, I got so tired a lookin' an' a climbin' an' a thinkin' that I jes lay down at th' head o' th' Falls an' went asleep, an' I never woke up till I heered maw a scream-in'."

"Did y' ever hear th' likes o' that?" commented the grey-haired preacher. "Th' boy an' the sun facin' other, a gazin' at other, each a lookin' into th' eyes o' th' other! The center o' light an' the center o' a soul. An' the soul'll live w'en th' sun goes down t' come up no more. Heavings, but it's an idee! I'll preach on that at my next apintment."

"An' how'd ye get out'n th' cave, Gyp?"

"O we jes stayed till th' fire got away from thar, an' we clum out an' come home th' back way o' th' mounting."

CHAPTER V

WHOA, BUCEPHALUS!

MANY a day has passed since that eventful night, and Gyp is much more contented since his father has fulfilled his vow and thrown his still into the rushing waters of Lindeno. He is beginning to feel himself somewhat of a man, and to take more than a boyish interest in things about him. One evening he was seated by the roadside watching the antics of a grey squirrel in the boughs of a hickory tree, when his attention was diverted by the sound of a small voice:

"Gyp, it's ha'nted."

Gyp turned and saw standing near by a negro lad about his own size, bare-headed, bare-footed, and almost bare-legged, plunging the toes of one foot into the dust of the roadway. He had great, glistening eyes and plump, round cheeks.

"W'at's ha'nted?" Gyp inquired.

"Ole shanty on de hill."

"W'at's th' matter 'ith th' shanty?"

"Full o' ghostses, jes full o' awful ghostses!"

"Ghostses hain't nuffin, Mose, tha hain't jes nuffin at all."

"O tha be, Gyp, an' powerful bad."

"Did yer see 'em? How'd ye know?"

"Dad he got mos' caught las' night!"

"Did?"

"Yes'n he feel de ghostses bref blo' dish-a-way: s-h-o-o-o, w-h-e-o!" and Mose puckered his lips and expelled his breath by way of illustration. "Deed, Gyp, dat ar ole ghos' jes' rampages an' rumpages fru dat ar house till weuns be skert mos' t' def, an' maw she be about plum sick, an' pap's limp as a rag."

"I haint afear'd o' no ghostses as ever wus born."

"I be, Gyp."

"Say, Mose, le's go up an' kotch 'em?"

"Yer don't dast."

"C'm on; who's afear'd. Le's youns an' weuns have a ghost hunt?"

"It'll eat yer head off, Gyp. It cries like a cat."

"Who cares fer a cat?" contemptuously answered the Stybright lad.

"But dish hain't no cat. Hit's a ghost, an' it'll swish yer head off'n roast it in de fiah. Yer don't dast, Gyp, yer don't dast."

"Let 'er swish, Mose! I be up at youns 's cabin when de dark come on."

The proposition so frightened the tattered little pickaninny that he stood speechless, gazing into the face of Gyp; then turned to see if the road was clear toward home.

"Who's this little nigger you got here?" inquired Gyp's father, coming up at that moment.

Without waiting for an answer he said to Mose:
"Boy, w'at's yer name?"

"Moses - Elijer - Jer'mijer - 'lyasses - Ajax - Ad'nijer-Ishma'l Jones."

"That's a whoppen' big name fer sech a teenty mite. W'at does yer pap call yer?"

"Mose."

"That sounds like gitten' somewhar. It's def'nit. It's t' th' pint."

Mose waited for no more catechetical exercises. His black feet flew up the road as if the world were coming to an end, and scarcely halted till he came in sight of the "ole shanty," where goblins and spirits of evil were supposed to revel. As the paintless weather-boarding appeared through the trees, Mose slackened his pace. He ducked his head and peered between the rails of the fence, his empty little head filled with all sorts of uncanny imaginings. He saw the ruins of the old mansion, and he crept slowly along, hunkering down behind the sagging, lichen-covered palings. His eyes glared at the open doors and the sashless windows, the mossy roof, the tall chimneys, the bunches of forsaken shrubs, and his trembling heart beat faster and faster lest some terrible wraith should flit across his vision. On he crept till he passed the gateposts, then with all the energy that was in his fat little body he ran, swinging his arms and uttering a series of almost inaudible grunts, and looking back over his shoulder at each jump to make sure

that all the goblins of the nether world were not after him.

When he reached home he found a number of men sitting out on the woodpile discussing this very thing. There was Pete Johnsing who had seen Gen. Washington in all his glory, and remembered all the distinguished presidents and other great men of the earth for the last three-score-years-and-ten, including the great "Mr. Linkum." He knew a thing or two. He had waited on "Massa Tom," when in the days of his prime he ruled in that now ghost-haunted mansion. "O yes," he told the startled group, he remembered the "young leddies and gemmen," and how they filled the night with conviviality. Great old house it was, the pride of the neighborhood, piazzas wide, doors ample, columns fluted, halls roomy, mirrors shining, carpets luxurious, everybody happy. Grand times when the night was filled with music and the slippered darkies served. And the plantation? O yes, Pete Johnsing knew all about how the black men toiled in the fields and tickled the thin, red earth till it smiled with plenty, and how the darkies made the big house hilarious with song, and snored in their quarters, or in some jubilant hoe-down made grim night joyous in spite of itself. No talk about ghosts in those days. But now! The gray-thatched patriarch pointed his thin index finger toward the ridge, delivered a volley of tobacco juice toward the woodpile, and said:

"W'at yo' know about ghostses in dat manshun, Jim Sluby?"

"I knows too much, 'deed I does, Pete John-sing."

"Well, w'at yo' know?"

"I knows I seed suffin walkin' dar in de light o' de moon, an' it sung lak de win' in de hazel bushes. An' I heah'd bells on de staihs, an' sof' sounds lak de purrin' o' a cat. An' I see white fo'ms movin' behin' de winders wid a soun' lak a tree w'en it breshes ag'in de side o' de house."

"Dan Blossom, w'at yo' know?" Pete inquired, giving no heed to the gruesome tale told by Sluby.

"W'en I thinks 'bout w'at I knows I'ze so skert I git all wobbly."

"Tell it out; it's lies anyway, 'sides, dar hain't no ghostses in dis woodpile."

"One night," proceeded the truthful Dan, "I comin' pas' ole shanty an' I seed de shuttahn movin', an' odder things a movin'. I seed two cullud men with no heads on 'em come out'n de big house an' go to de well. An' dem cullud men laid dah skinny han's on de win'las an' swung it roun' an' roun'. An' I heah'd it creak an' creak; an' I see dem headless black gemmen look down into de well as if somethin' down dar. I seed 'em bring up a skull on dat 'ar win'las out'n de well an' tak' it in dar yarms an' go back into de big house; an I heah'd suffin cough; den suffin fell down staihs, bump, bump, bumpety bump, as if dem niggah's heads a bumpin' down,

bumpy, bumpy; an' suffin squealed lak a rabbit w'en a dawg has it in his mouth. An' now, w'en I comes pas' dat ar house, I comes a roun' by de back medder."

"O Unc' Pete Johnsing," Mose broke in, out of breath, "Gyp Stybright he be—he be—goin' t' de big house t' ketch—t' ketch de go-o-o-oses!"

"Who gwine do dat?" echoed a half dozen terrified voices.

"Gyp! he gwine—gwine t'night."

"We'll stop dat. Ghostses 'll eat 'em up. Whar Unc' 'Lijer? He's afeah'd o' nuffin."

"Unc' Lije gone t' town foh med'cine foh li'l sick Pete."

"Le's go meet 'im an' help 'im keep Gyp away 'fore th' ghostses eat 'im. C'm on."

Very reluctantly the frightened negroes obeyed. Uncle Elijah was the reputed hero of the community. At a good distance from danger Goliath of Gath was nothing to him. He was afraid of nothing. His vocabulary was all heroics. Lions and hyenas were his daily food, and grizzlies were nothing accounted of. Meanwhile Uncle Elijah was having some experiences unknown to the woodpile philosophers. He had left the doctor's office as the shades of evening were falling, and as he neared the "ghos' house" his fears for his own skin were greater than his anxiety for little Pete.

The steed on which he rode was old and thin, and his stumpy knees stood out like pine knots.

The creature's head was immense, and his ears rose and fell as his heavy hoofs thumped over the roadway. When he attempted to trot the sound of his feet reminded one of the old-time singing master counting time: "one-two-three-four; one-two-three-four; one-two-three-sing!"

"Sof'ly dah, Bocef'lus!" crooned the rider, patting his raw-boned steed on the shoulder. "Wish I had some cotton bolls to put on yo' big, clumsy foots!"

His own heart was thumping against his ribs. Everything was still as he passed the empty house, save the whisper of the winds and the occasional flap of a loose board on the gable. A white owl flew out and perched on a dead tree, making a slight crash among the branches. Uncle Elijah turned quickly and saw two great eyes burning like candles. He had just passed what he supposed to be the danger line when a puff of wind lifted his hat from his frowzy head and tossed it into the roadway.

"Wo-ah, Bocef'lus!" he snapped like the sound of a percussion cap. But Bucephalus had entered into the spirit of the place and refused to be halted.

"Wo-ah, wo-ah dah, yo' dum beas'!" he urged, pulling on the reins and leaning back until the stirrups stuck out straight before him. "Wo-o dah, I say wo-o dah!"

He heard something behind him, and he gave himself a twist in the saddle and looked back.

O horrors of horrors! A strange object was after him.

"Wow-wow-wow! Go, Bocef'lus, go-ah! we be bof dead niggehs. Go, Bocef—wow-wow-wow-ow! I's a dum, dead niggeh, suah!"

Bucephalus pattered along beating time with his clumsy batons, being, as was supposed, on a full gallop, oscillating up and down like the walking beam in an oil derrick, and making about as much headway, his ears wig-wagging like signals on a battle ship. As ill luck would have it, his clumsy legs seemed to get tangled up in some way, and with a groan the old horse plunged forward with his ill-shapen nose in the dust, and rolled over on his side. Uncle Elijah turned a somersault over the beast's head and landed on the broad of his back in the middle of the road. He felt that his time had come, and, gathering himself together, looked down that direful highway and, feeling that his end was near, raised his imploring eyes to heaven and prayed:

"Hab mussy, Lawd! De good Lawd hab mussy an' grab ol' 'Lijer quick afore dat ghos' gittem! Snatch me f'm de jaws ob de adve'sary, an' spare my li'l Pete."

"Dat you, Unc' 'Lige?"

"I'm all a ready, Massa Ghos'; but be mussyful to mah boy Pete."

"Aw, 'Lige! ghostses hain't jes nuffin' at all."

"W'a? dat you, Gyp?"

"Yes, I been a doin' ma best t' ketch up."

At the witching hour "o' night's black arch the keystone," Gyp and the contingent from the woodpile conference came over the hill and down the road leading to the haunted mansion. It was a strange company. White men and black bent on running down the bogies and hobgoblins. To the negro company were added the Rev. William Watchcob, Jim Habor, Terbaccy Tom and Jay Grimp. It was a sorry looking procession. The negroes were bunched together, silent as the grave, the white folks leading on. The witch of Endor, as she stood face to face with the spirit of Samuel, could not have been filled with greater awe and horror. They felt that they were marching into the very clutches of the Evil One. But they wanted to "see Gyp through." Their wild eyes swept the night like searchlights, as they bumped and knocked against each other and tramped on one another's heels. Not one of them would go nearer the house than the "big road." There they stood bunched like a flock of sheep on a hot summer's day. They called to Gyp, and plead in all manner of staccato notes not to rush into the jaws of this invisible dragon.

"Goo'-bye, Gyp! De Lawd hab mussy!" they muttered at him as he started up the grass-grown walk. Poor Gyp! they never expected to see him again alive.

"Don't you niggers let that boy go in there alone," demanded the Rev. William Watchcob. "Be brave and show your colors!"

"G'off'n sho' yo' own culuhs," hissed a brawny negro as his eyes flashed on the minister.

"I'll go. I'll not see that boy go alone. Which of you is man enough to go along?"

"Take that sassy Jim Habor and Terbaccy Tom. Take care o' yer own white trash."

But on looking about, those worthies could not be seen.

"Wait, Gyp; hold on a minute. I'm goin' along. I'll show these skert niggers that the parson's not afear'd."

They started for the door and looked in, peering this way and that. They stood a moment in the dark hall, only the faint glimmer of their lantern relieving the heavy, ominous silence.

"Poor Gyp!" the negroes clucked, "we'll neb-beh see 'im no mo'. Goo'-bye, Gyp, goo'-bye!"

There was a muffled sound as of a sack of grain falling on the floor, followed by a crash like wings striking against a window. A momentary flash of fire blazed through the doorway and lit up the cracks in the wall. The sound of a pistol reverberated through the hollow chambers and smote on the ears of the horrified negroes. Following it came a sound like the bumping over the floor of a decapitated chicken, and then a short, sharp, snappy noise like that made by an owl in captivity. A light at the rear of the building grew brighter and brighter, and two forms were seen fleeing through the shrubs and tangled vines. It looked as if the house was on

fire. A scream rent the air and the negroes fled pell-mell from that bedeviled and unholy place.

There was another shot, and out of the building came a shriek which filled the night like the cry of a beast in pain. Up the road the black feet flew, the negroes snorting and puffing and tumbling over each other. Once out of sight of that demoniacal spot they halted to talk over the situation. They wondered how Gyp and the parson were making it, and they decided, after much palaver and brave argument, to go back. When they crossed the ridge they saw the sharp tongues of fire leaping from the windows. They hurried down and, when they came to the old sagging gate posts, they saw two shadowy forms outlined against the background of flame.

"It's Gyp's ghos' an' anodder ghos'! Wow-wow!" and away they fled again, never stopping till they reached the crest of the hill, when, looking back, they saw flames bursting through the roof and filling all the horizon with palpitant fire.

"De wo'ld am cummin' to an eend," declared Pete Johnsing, whose masterful spirit at the woodpile again found expression.

"Look dah! Look dah! Wha' dat, niggehs?" exclaimed the excited Pete, as he pointed to two figures plainly visible in the light of the burning structure.

"Fo' de Lawd, niggehs, it's Gyp an' de pah-son!"

"Yit's dar ghostses! Run, niggehs, run; tha's atter us! Wow-wow-wow! Run'r we be all dead niggehs, suah."

And they did run, run as the terrified never ran before or since—all except old Elijah, whose fall from Bucephalus had so lamed him that running was out of the question. He threw himself down by the roadside the most woe-begone of mortals, hoping that the ghosts of his little friend and of the preacher would pass him by unnoticed, yet assuredly feeling that his mortal end was near.

The ghosts, however, did see him. They walked straight up to him, and one of them coolly said:

"You old fool, what are you doin' here?"

"I'm a waitin' fer de golden ladder t' clim' up home, Mr. Ghos'!"

"Whar dem odder niggers gone?"

"De good Lawd done gib 'em de use o' dar laigs an' they done gone an' use 'em. Ize aready fer de golden staihs; but ma laig's mos' broke, so Mistah Ghos' tech it sof'ly."

"You old ejit, we'er not ghos'es. Ize Gyp, an' that's th' pahson, an' thar's de ghose's w'at ha'nt th' big house," and he flung a dead owl and a cat at his feet. "Ghosts hain't jes nuffin' at all."

CHAPTER VI

OVER THE RANGE

"T'morrer, Gyp, we's gwine over th' range," said Seloe Stybright to her boy.

"W'y we gwine ober dar?"

"Jus' t' rest an' see the water an' th' white swans."

"Be it far away, maw?"

"It's a right smart bit."

"See lots o' nice things?"

"Lots an' lots of 'em, Gyp."

"Be paw gwine, too?"

"We be all gwine, mah boy."

"W'at's it lak on that 'ar side o' th' moun-ting? Be thar houses an' dogs an' critters, trees an' streams, an' be folks ober dar like weuns?"

"Jus' de same, Gyp, but diff'nt. Th' lake's full o' water, an' dar be skiffs an' fine boys an' gals a floatin', sometimes a singin', sometimes a fishin' an' sometimes a sittin' on de green grass pullin' white cloveh an' a watchin' dar shadders in de lake. An' dar be sojers an' tents an' flags an' guns an' drums."

"My, maw, I wisht it was t'morrer."

"Weuns be not a ready fer t'morrer, Gyp."

Lots o' things t' do, kase weuns'll not be back soon."

"I'll help yer out, maw; w'at yer wants me t' do?"

"Well, Gyp, yer maw wants yer t' go up th' mounting t' Terbaccy Tom's house an' tell'm yer mammy wants t' borry his hoss t' carry her over th' range."

"'E's a bad man, maw. 'E's agin us."

"I know, Gyp; but he'll do it; he'll do it fer me this time."

"He's a secesh, maw?"

"Yes, Gyp, I know; but 'e'll not hurt yer."

"I'll go, maw," and away he went, barefoot, up the graveled road with all the hopefulness and dear anticipations of youth, thinking only of the morrow and the good times before him, and how very far away they seemed.

He stopped suddenly, for he saw before him a big black thing on wheels, the like of which he had never seen before. A closed carriage was a very unusual sight in that part of the country, and Gyp was greatly exercised to make out what it was and what it meant. But his curiosity was intensified when he heard conversation, and looking under the trees he saw a sweet-faced girl for whom a well-dressed, elderly gentleman was breaking branches of rhododendron. The girl's arms were full of the glowing blossoms and the ground at her feet was radiant with sprays of color. As they came toward the carriage with

their arms laden, the girl discovered Gyp by the roadside.

"Oh, papa! what a funny-looking young fellow!"

"Isn't he an odd chap?" said the elderly gentleman, smiling.

"I wonder what his name is?"

"We'll find out, Aida. Say, boy; come up here."

Gyp's heart bounded. He scarcely knew whether to be pleased or frightened, but came forward somewhat shyly, wondering in his heart what this strange man and this beautiful girl wanted with him.

"Boy, what's your name?"

"Gyp."

"Isn't that a funny name, papa?"

"What's the rest of it, my lad?"

"It's jes Gyp, Gyp Stybright, that's all."

"Gyp Stybright," echoed the little girl. "Isn't he queer, papa; with the oddest name you ever heard?" laughed the sweet, pink-faced child behind her sheaf of rhododendrons.

"W'at be your name, Mister?" and Gyp turned inquisitor.

"Do I have to tell you my name?" the stranger replied with arched brows.

"I tol' yer w'at mine was. Don't yer wanter play fair?"

The question amused the little girl immensely. "Why certainly, my boy, I always play fair. You're a bright young man, Gyp."

"But yer haven't tol' me w'at yer name be?"

"Do you think you would know if I told you?"

"I allus knows w'at I be tol'."

"Well, Gyp, I'll tell you; my name is Richard Moncure. Now do you know?"

"Yes, it be Richard Moncure. But I nebber heerd o' ye afore. Whar'd ye come f'm?"

"No matter, boy; I'm here now. Where'd you hail from?"

"Down yander. Say, whose gal's that ye got?"

At this blunt question both Mr. Moncure and his daughter laughed heartily. The musical voice of the girl was the sweetest Gyp had ever heard. He looked at her in wonderment; then at Mr. Moncure and joined in the laughter, showing his array of exquisite teeth.

"Isn't he droll, papa; just the cutest fellow you ever saw?"

"Ain't ye gwine t' tell me th' gal's name? I gin ye mine."

"Gyp, you'd tempt anybody to give you all they had. If it will do you any good and make your heart any happier I will tell you. This is my daughter, Aida."

"That's a mighty purty name."

"And Aida's a mighty pretty girl."

"Deed she be," was Gyp's decided comment.

"And she is just as pretty as she looks," replied Moncure, playfully.

"O papa, hush!"

"'E kin keep on a goin' ef he's a mindter, as fur as I care."

"Well, good-bye, Gyp; we are going," and Mr. Moncure handed his daughter into the carriage.

"Whar be ye gwine?" the boy asked, disappointed that they were to leave him so soon.

"Home," and the wheels began to move down the road.

"Good-bye, Gyp," called Aida, as she thrust her head out of the carriage and waved her hand to the bewildered boy, who scarcely knew what to make of it all. He stood there watching the retreating conveyance as it rocked and swayed over the rough road until it disappeared around a point of the hill.

"Nebbeh seed th' lak o' that in all mah bo'n days," mused the lad as he proceeded on his way. "That's a heap better'n th' lake an' th' white swan's w'at maw was talkin' about. I'll bet she's nice;" and he looked back in the hope that he might see them return. But instead of seeing the carriage, he beheld Terbaccy Tom coming through the woods with his gun on his shoulder. Seeing Gyp he stopped.

"Hello, you rat!" he called scornfully to the boy.

"Hello, Terbaccy Tom."

"Don't call me Terbaccy Tom. Call me Tom. I'm goin' t' lick the first cuss what calls me that name again."

"I didn't know yer had another name."

"Well I have an' people'll soon find it out."

"Well yer needn't t' jaw me; I didn't gin it to yer."

"Co'se not. Whar ye gwine?"

"Maw sent me up t' youns house t' ast ye ef she'n paw c'd borrer yer hoss fer t'morrer t' drive over th' mounting."

"I ain't got no hoss."

"Y' ain't? W'y I seed ye a drivin' it yisti-day."

"I sold it to-day to th' C'nfed'rate Gov'ment, an' am just on my way home."

"W'at's th' C'nfed'rate Gov'ment?" Gyp inquired, scarcely comprehending these tremendously big words. If Tom had said "rebel" or "secesh" Gyp would have known; but such overwhelming nomenclature was too much for him. "W'at yer mean by them words?"

"Them's the fellers what's a gwine to lick all creation out'n them Union cusses."

"W'at tha been a doin'?"

"Tryin' t' free th' niggers. Some o' you fellers a gwine t' git shot up, 'fore long. I got a big-mouthed ole dawg here what'll bark at th' heels o' some o' you Unioners onc't it gets a chance," and he patted his gun knowingly.

"An' don't yer fergit, Tom, that dawgs what barks too much sometimes gits pepper in ther' own legs. I'm sorry yer hain't got no hoss," said the boy, not desiring to carry the other question farther. "I spec' maw'll hafter stay t' home."

"That's th' bes' place fer wimmin these days. It's gettin' pretty skeery here in the mountings, with the Yanks on one side and th' Johnnies on th' tother. Be you a Yank?"

Gyp pulled a small soiled United States flag out of his trouser pocket, shook it out before Tom and said: "That's whar I be."

"And that's whar I be," echoed Tom, taking a Confederate flag from his shot pouch and holding it up alongside of Gyp's flag. "Y'see it's bigger'n yourn."

"Yes'n, you be bigger'n I be, but I c'n out run ye, an' out climb ye, an' out jump ye; an' I've seen menny a bantam rooster lick an ol' yaller shanghai an' mak' it run. You fellers'll git licked, Tom, ef you is bigger'n I be."

"Gyp, I like yer stuff; an' I'm sorry we be on diff'nt sides."

"I spose we's all gotter take sides, Tom. But I wanted t' go over th' mounting t' see th' lake an' th' swans an' the nice houses. Now I'll hafter stay t' home, an' maw an' paw too, kase weuns can't get no hoss."

"Walkin' 's good."

"Maw can't walk. Maw hain't well. Maw haster do lots o' work. She hitches the ox t' th' bull-tongue plow an' plows. Maw drops th' corn in th' groun' an' hoes th' sprouts, an' pulls th' fodder an' totes it t' th' shed. Maw hoes th' taters in th' patch beyent th' house. She goes t' town in th' two-wheeled cart, sells th' chickens

an' th' beans, an' th' squir'ls w'at paw shoots. An' maw she's mos' plum done out; an' paw tho't he'd lak t' give maw a rest over th' range at th' lake."

The cold heart of Tom was touched by the boy's pathos, and by the tears which were on his cheeks, and he replied:

"I'd give yer th' hoss, Gyp, but it's gone."

"Guess I'd better go, too," and Gyp turned sorrowfully toward home.

"Weuns'll go up the mounting, anyhow," was Guy Stybright's hopeful comment when Gyp told of his disappointment. "I can borry a cart, an' weuns'll hitch up th' ol' ox, Jerry; an', maw, weuns'll git yer t' th' lake. So jes go t' bed an' sleep til th' mornin'."

Stybright awoke early next morning. He saw that Seloe was resting quietly by his side and he thought he would not disturb her. "Mah poor, tired wumman; let her sleep for the ride is a long one;" and he slipped quietly from the bed, kindled the fire and arranged for the morning meal. Very softly he went about through the house. With the journey before them he felt that a little more sleep would do her good. He brought some water from the spring; then took a pail from a forked stick on the wall and went out to milk. He fed the old ox, Jerry, and returned to the house to find "the mammy" and Gyp still asleep. Day was breaking, and the mists of the morning hung grey along the valley.

He went to the bedside and laid his hand gently on the white brow that was turned from him, and said:

"Mah sweet wumman—what! Seloe! O mah God, Seloe, Seloe!" He started back, stared at the woman a moment, then caught her pale face in his hands and turned it toward him. Her wide-open eyes glared on him as they had never done before. A look not of earth was there. He knew what it meant.

"O Seloe, Seloe! Speak t' me, mah darlin', mah darlin'; O be you dead, mah poor Seloe! Wak' up, mah love an' speak t' me; mah darlin' wak' t' me; speak t' me. O God! God! God!"

The pitiful lamentations of the husband at his awful discovery filled the house and woke Gyp from his little couch in the corner. He looked into the bed whereon his mother lay, white and unresponsive. He had never seen death in this guise before, and he could not realize it. He bent over and kissed the cold lips, saying:

"Wak' up, mammy, weuns be goin' t' clim' th' mountings th' day!"

"She's clum her last mounting, Gyp! O God! God! we be alone, alone!" and the father in his pitiful grief threw himself on the bed, took her in his arms and bore the rigid form to the door.

"Give her th' breath o' th' mountings and mebbly she'll come to. Look up, mah Seloe, on the old hills. Open yer lungs. Breathe in th' mornin'," and his tears fell upon her face as he

looked, O so hungrily, into those expressionless eyes. "Seloe, Seloe! O mah darlin', has yer husband killed yer that he made life so hard fer ye?" and he drew the cold cheek up and pressed it against his own again and again. "F'rgive me, mah poor dead love; speak an' tell me yes, tell me I be f'given an' tell me once more 'at yer loves me! O Gyp, Gyp! yer poor mammy's gone; she be gone, Gyp!"

"W'at yer mean, paw?"

"Mah boy, mah boy; she be dead, O mah God be with her, she be dead!"

And Gyp, seeing his father's tears, began to cry, and tugged at the robe of his mother, and clung to her skirts.

"Don't cry, mah boy. She be gone t' heav'n. pore, pore mammy;" and he pressed her speechless lips to his in a paroxysm of grief and affection.

"She'll never speak t' me an' li'l Gyp, no more!"

"Won't she never come back to weuns, never?"

"She'll never come back, Gyp. Never. God's took her. God's took her!"

Stybright carried the precious burden back and laid it on the bed. And never did nurse or mother smooth the coverings about a sleeping babe with greater gentleness than did the hard, rough hands of the crushed husband draw the thin, faded quilts about the form of his beloved dead, sobbing and clucking the almost inaudible

name, "Seloe! Seloe!" through his blinding tears.

"Gyp," sobbed the father, turning from the bed to his mystified and weeping child, "Weuns'll have a bite t' eat, an' you must run an' tell th' people. Pore boy, pore boy!" and he took the boy upon his knees. "And she loved yer, Gyp; she loved yer, an' now we'll hafter put her in th' groun'."

"I don't want t' put my maw in th' groun'," and the lad looked appealingly to his father through his tears.

"Nuther do I, Gyp! O Seloe, Seloe! O God! God! God!" and the grief-mastered father set the child down from his knees, leaned his elbows on the table and, with his face in his hands, cried as if his heart would break.

Seloe had gone over the range.

CHAPTER VII

SPEARS AND PRUNING HOOKS

"It's awful, Judy."

"What's awful, Sykes?"

"The things that Jim Habor and Terbaccy Tom be up to."

"What's they been a doin' next?"

"Gone and set the old house afire."

"Whose house; not yourn?"

"No, the old ghost house."

"Did y'ever!"

"Nothin' left but ashes."

"What possessed them, Sykes?"

"The devil."

"They'd do anything the devil wanted them to."

"That's so, Judy; that's so. The father of lies is the daddy of Jim Habor."

"But why'd they burn the house down?"

"So's to get the blame put on the parson and Gyp. Habor has a gredge agin 'em, ye know."

"But I don't see how they could burn the buildin' an' the other fellers get the blame on't."

"It's this way, Judy. Gyp and the preacher was on a ghost hunt. Preacher went along to please Gyp. Habor and Tom sneaked into the buildin' the back way, like the scoundrels they

is, and while the house was bein' searched by the tother fellers, set it afire and run, so's the preacher and the boy'd be found in there and get the blame of it. They're agoin' to swear they seen 'em in thar when the bleeze started."

"I don't wonder ye called it awful. That Habor's old Nick's first born child. When the gallows gits its own Jim'll be at the end of the rope."

"Yes'n some day they may forget to hang him; jest drill him with a han'full o' buckshot. Hangin's a slow process when the mob gits busy."

"But is there nothin' they can do to save themselves, the preacher and Gyp? Cayn't they prove they didn't do it?"

"In times like these, Judy, men don't get a chance to prove anything."

"But they cayn't do nothin' without convictin' 'em, and shorely they 'cayn't get no ividence agin' 'em."

"But if the gorillars get them, they won't need no ividence. Gorillars don't ask yer to prove nothin'."

"What's yer meanin', Sykes? You shorely don't mean to tell me—"

"That's jest what I be tellin' ye, Judy. And the big pity it is, Jim'll spread the lie, and the gorillars'll believe him, and there'll be a rush in the night and the mornin'll see what it'll see."

"Ye don't mean, Sykes, that they'll kill the preacher and the boy for doin' nothin'?"

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"That's the game, Judy, that's the game. They's Union, ye know!"

"It's the game of brutes!" and there was fire in Judy's eyes as she spoke, and there was an ominous twitch to her little round nose.

"Jim's in that class, all right. All beasts has hearts; but Jim Habor's got nuthin' but a gizzard. He's brute lackin' the necessary innards."

"What you think they'll do?"

"Maybe get atter them in the night when they's a sleepin' and burn the house over them, as they tried to do in the old ghost house."

"But the parson and Gyp ain't so easy trapped. They's not agwine to be snared like that. Has nobody put 'em on their guard or told 'em t' be keerful?"

"They know the whole game, Judy; and are jest watchin' fer them fellers to attack 'em. Somebody else'll drop 'fore they does, ef they don't watch out."

"O I hope they'll get 'em fust. They is terrible men, Habor and Terbaccy Tom."

"That's true, Judy, true as fallin' into the crick. They is dangerous; and there'll be no peace in these mountings until they's got rid of. And there is that pesky Snags Groucher; she's the worst rattler in the whole nest of sarpints."

"And a rattler she is, Sykes, a she rattlesnake, sneakin' in the grass, with pisen in her one yaller snag and vile tongue."

"There's agoin' to be times up in these mount-

ings, Judy. Blood's agoin' to flow afore this thing ends. It's a flowin' now."

"D'ye mean that the bloody flood of war will splash up this high?"

"That's what I means, Judy; awful times is on us."

"It makes my blood boil. We'll hafter take a hand, Sykes."

"And the wust of it is, it'll be among old friends and neighbors."

"But what can we do?"

"Shoot or be shot."

"They haint no middle ground?"

"None."

"Cayn't leave the country if we wanted to or make our getaway?"

"No. They'd ketch us afore we got out."

"Then we'll stay and defend ourselves."

"Or go out and shoot them first."

"It's awful, Sykes. But if it's God's will I'll get my gun."

"And the sooner ye get it the safer ye'll be." Judy Gans was mute for a little while. She listened to the rushing of the water in the ravine below. Birds were in the boughs of the trees. The air was filled with fragrance. There was a quiet over all the mountains as if nature were asleep. She looked up into the face of her companion and said:

"It's all so peaceful. I cayn't think it possible. Don't let us talk any more about it."

"Ceasin' to talk won't stop the war. It's here."

"But it seems so terrible. Sit down, Sykes, here on this step, and let us talk about other things."

"I'll do it, Judy. It's a pleasure to get a feller's mind away from blood and butchery. I've been thinkin' about them so much that I'm about ready to shoot the first feller what says a word agin' the old flag."

"So be I. But we're not a goin' to talk any more about that."

"No, nothin' more now; we'll have a sweet time together, fer there's no tellin' when we may have another chance."

"Now don't get blue, Sykesy. They'll be lots o' chances."

"Tell you what we'll do; make 'em if they hain't none."

"Make what?"

"Chances, dear."

"Chances fer what?"

"Now Judy, you's gettin' me in a corner?"

"Well cayn't ye get out."

"Maybe."

"If ye cayn't I'll give ye a lift."

"Judy, I'm allus happy when a sittin' along side o' you."

"That's comfortin'."

"Ye have a way with ye that makes a fellow feel as if peaches was ripe."

"I'm a frustrate comforter, Sykes."

Snickerby's warlike feelings were indefinitely postponed. He sat on the step of Judy's cabin. He looked up to the sharp peak towering before them, a few straggling pines dotting its rocky slopes with bits of shadows. He glanced at the twisted roadway which lay like some great red-dish monster with its head hidden beyond a cluster of tulip trees. He pulled his long chin, looked into Judy's face and replied:

"Yes, Judy, it's mighty palliatin' when a feller can set all alone with a girl what onderstands him."

"And sees right through him," and she gave one of those sweet, hilarious laughs which startled the whole neighborhood into good cheer and made companions of the rocks and hills.

"There's somethin' I've been a thinkin' for a long time, Judy."

"That's interestin'; about me?"

"You'n me."

"Can I help you any on it?"

"Dunno. It's up to you when you knows what it is."

"But I cayn't help much when I knows nothin'."

"Well, I'm jes startin' in to 'luminare. Been a wantin' to tell ye about it; but this pesky war's kep me back."

"Why'd that keep ye back?"

"Cause I might be killed, and then it wouldn't be wuth while."

"But yer not dead yet, so be happy while ye can. Lemme hear it."

"Well, Judy, y' know you've got a cabin and I've got a cabin."

"That makes two cabins."

"You live alone and I live alone."

"That's two livin' alone."

"I'm on yan side o' the mounting and you're on this side the mounting."

"Good piece apart, Sykes, for war times."

"What's the use, Judy."

"Nothin' in it, Sykes."

"Which side o' the mounting'd you ruther live on?"

"The side you're on."

"Well, I'm on this side now."

"Then stay, Sykesey."

"It's a good move."

"Yer don't hafter move. Stay whar ye be."
And Snickerby stayed.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE ALTAR OF PATRIOTISM

FROM gathering rhododendrons on the mountain-side Mr. Moncure and his daughter, Aida, made their way to their beautiful Southern home. Richard Moncure was a Northerner by birth and education, but had removed to the South many years before the outbreak of the Great Rebellion. The past year had been to him one of great anxiety. He saw the new flag of the Confederacy flung to the winds, and how cheerfully thousands of his fellow citizens followed it. What should he do? Go with the people of his adopted state, or flee to the North and follow the flag of his childhood?

He sat on the wide piazza of his home meditating on the momentous issues that confronted him. The days were growing darker with each set of sun and the extreme gravity of the situation was forcing itself upon him. Looking up from his reverie he saw a buggy halt at the gate. His old friend, Wade Hampton, leaped to the ground and ran up the walk to greet him. There was intense concern in their countenances as they met, grasped hands and looked into each other's faces. In that glance whole

histories and tragedies were written. Mr. Hampton was the first to speak after the cordial greeting.

"I am on my way North, Moncure, and I have stopped to say good-bye. There is no knowing when we may meet again."

"Have you really cast the die?"

"There is nothing else to do. I cannot remain here and be neutral, and I cannot go with the South."

"Come up a few minutes and let us talk it over. These are grievous times, friend Hampton," Moncure said, pathetically, as they walked to the end of the piazza and sat facing each other.

"I can scarcely believe it possible," Mr. Hampton responded with a sigh, "that the Union between the states must be dissolved. To set up two separate governments side by side would, in my judgment, be more than a mistake; it would be a national crime."

"Our Southern statesmen do not seem to realize that a slave nation on one side of the Potomac and a free nation on the other would result in no end of bitter contention and recrimination, if not in border-ruffianism and ultimately in civil war. It would certainly involve international complications which would prove disastrous to both nations." After a moment's pause, Moncure added solemnly: "Maybe it is just as well that this great question be settled

by this generation, and settled once for all." The sigh that followed was one of renunciation.

"Possibly, if it must come," Hampton replied, "now is as good a time as any; but only God knows what the end will be."

"Sometimes it is better to endure the ills we have than to throw open the bloody gates of war and by fratricidal conflict end them! But who knows whether this is such a time? Slavery is the only bone of contention between the sections, and I feel that it would be better to meet the inevitable calmly, strive to be just and equitable, frame laws in the interests of the entire nation, do the thing that is right, trust God and let the question of slavery settle itself."

"I believe so. With that out of the way all grounds for hostility would disappear and the valiant South and vigorous North dwell together in amity and industrial peace."

"It seems now impossible," sighed Moncure as he leaned back in his chair.

"No doubt you are right. The day of reason is passed. Argument and compromise are over. Sad and awful as it is, the war is on in grim and ghastly earnestness." And Mr. Hampton paced back and forth on the piazza as he spoke. "Brother has taken up arms against brother, father against son, neighbor against neighbor. The husbandman has abandoned his plow and the laborer his tools; the high born and the low born have gone forth side by side, some in blue, some

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in gray, to shoot, to stab and club each other to the death. The lawyer has given up his briefs and the physician his patients to join in the game of human butchery. Ministers of God have gone down from their pulpits to fight against each other in carnal death-grip, or, as becomes them better, to go forth as spiritual guides and comforters on the red fields of the dying. The tidal waves, one running North and the other running South, have met in terrific onslaught and the red spray of the collision has been flung heaven high, and the south wind blows it North and the north wind blows it South, and it falls in scarlet dew on mountain and plain, on river and lake, on the altar of prayer and on the communion table; and in that scarlet rain the nation has at last awoken. But it is too late to put up our umbrellas."

Mr. Hampton was almost beside himself as he gave utterance to these fervid sentiments. His eyes burned restlessly as if he saw the mighty shock of war and valleys filled with heroic dead.

"Then," said Moncure, "we must take the hazard and abide by the consequences."

"Moncure," and Hampton turned directly upon his friend, and pointing his long index finger toward him, "it is time for us to leave the country."

"I have come to that conclusion. For the past few weeks the loafers on the street corners have barked the word 'Union' at me as I passed

along; and no longer ago than yesterday, when my daughter, Aida, was with me, I saw her blue eyes flash with indignation as some sneering remark was made about the old flag. For her sake and my own, I feel that we must leave. It is not safe to remain longer."

"Have you received any threatening letters?"

"Yes; to-day I received an outrageous communication from Jim Habor, the Confederate scout, and that villain and blackguard, Terbaccy Tom, warning me that unless I espoused the Confederate cause within ten days, or left the country, I would be waited on by the vigilantes."

"They were very considerate to give you ten days. They notified me that unless I left the country within twenty-four hours, or reported for military duty, I would be shot!"

"Is it possible!" Mr. Moncure paused a moment. Then the old-time patriotic fire blazed in his eyes. "My brother," said he with emphasis, "we cannot check the avalanche nor turn back the tidal wave. The red spray is falling around us now. There is nothing before us but bloody arbitrament at the cannon's mouth. I see it all. The mountains are filled with horses and chariots of fire! Passion is in the saddle and the peace-maker's vocation is gone. Heaven help us."

"That is true, my brother. The two flags are face to face and the fight must go to a finish. The sooner we reach the lines the better," and he arose to go.

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"Wade Hampton," and Mr. Moncure spoke with deep emotion, "my neighbor and friend, farewell. I will follow you within twenty-four hours."

They clasped hands and stood for a moment looking into each other's faces. They were giving up everything—home, possessions, friends, possibly life. But they felt it to be the call of patriotism, and there was no turning back. Their hands gripped with the friendship of years.

"Farewell, Moncure, and may God bless and help you."

"Hampton, farewell; God be with you, and give you safe journey to the Union lines."

The wheels died away and Moncure turned into the house. That morning he had read the Fourteenth Chapter of Isaiah, and although he was no exegete, it seemed to have a wonderful meaning to him. Now it came back with added significance. He picked up a well-worn Bible from the table and turned again to the words of the prophet, and read: *Prepare ye slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers!* "Terribly true," said he by way of comment. "The fathers have sinned and we and our children must suffer. And because they have sinned we must 'prepare slaughter!'"

He read on: *I will break the Assyrian in my land and upon my mountains, and tread him under foot; then shall the yoke depart from off them and his burdens depart from their shoul-*

der. "Ah, there will be plenty of 'breaking upon my mountains,' breakings of homes and breakings of hearts and breakings of hopes and cherished friendships! and the result will be that the 'yoke' shall be broken and the burden lifted from the shoulders of the oppressed! It is the prophesy of broken fetters and liberated bondsmen." He continued:

There cometh a smoke out of the North, and there is no straggler in his ranks. What then shall one answer the messenger of the nation? "It started yonder at Sumpter, but now the smoke of battle has darkened all the Potomac. And what shall my answer be to the messenger of the nation? A patriot has but one duty—to obey." He closed the Bible and laid it on the table.

"Come here, my daughter," he called up the stairway to Aida.

"Yes, papa."

As she came tripping joyously down the stairs, he said to her, extending his hands:

"My daughter, we leave the old home to-night."

"Is it as bad as that, papa?"

"Yes, my child. Take your last look on these familiar scenes, for we must give them all up. Come with me a moment."

He led her by the hand to the garden, where luxurious flowers bloomed and two tall lindens cast their welcome shade. Two graves were there, graves which the father had not failed to visit day by day for years. They kept his great

heart soft and tender. They were the graves of his wife and only son. He knelt down and kissed the bright blossoms about which the purity of the dead seemed to linger. He laid his hands caressingly on the green mounds and his tears rained like jewels into the sympathetic grass. It was love's last libation. Would he ever look upon these graves again? The pitiless presentment forced its way into his very soul. He arose, his eyes swimming in their baths of tears, and as he turned to take a last look, he said through his sobs: "God be with you till we meet again."

Aida took him by the hand, kissed it, and looking up into his face, said:

"Dear papa, it's hard to be a patriot, isn't it?"

"Yes, my child, God knows how hard it is for us. But we cannot be anything else."

"If you go to war, papa, I'll go too."

"We will talk of that again, my darling child. Now we must prepare to leave our beautiful home and these dear graves and make our way North as best we can. We will never see our home again. They will burn it when we are gone. The one thing for us to do now is to save our lives, if possible. This is the price of liberty."

When they returned to the house they found Jim Habor at the door, in his grey uniform and insolent manner, while Terbaccy Tom held the horses at the gate. A crafty, sinister smile was on his face, as he raised his hat, bowed contemptuously, and handed Mr. Moncure a piece of pa-

per. He then turned to the gate, where he and Tom mounted their horses and rode away toward the city. As they looked back they saw Moncure and Aida with their heads close together reading the white sheet which seemed to tremble in their hands. The note read:

"Mr. Richard Moncure:

"You will report for service at the Confederate headquarters to-morrow morning at eight o'clock.

"JIM HABOR."

"The fool!" hissed Moncure through his close-shut teeth. "Eight A. M.! There are sixteen hours between this and eight to-morrow morning. It is moonlight. Six hours will find us at the Stybright cabin, and ten more beyond the reach of all danger!"

If our prophesies only came true, how sweet a thing it would be to paint the hours that lie beyond!

"But papa, what about the bandits?"

"My darling, we take our chances!"

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND STATE

It was court week in the town of Franklin. The dingy temple of justice stood a solemn mass of brick, columned at the entrance and domed at the roof, in the midst of a campus of patriarchal trees. A broad street, with dilapidated sidewalks, bounded the public square in the midst of which the court house stood. The homes of the residents hung round about the farther side of the street and gazed into the shadowy campus like little fat Dutch burghers watching a circus tent. A few streets swung off from this box-like center of the town and lost themselves in the encompassing woods. The mountains stood round about the county seat and, from their soaring heights, overshadowed the scales of justice.

It was 9:30 by the old clock back of the judge's bench. The morning was as gentle as ever tempted the meadow blossoms into smiling loveliness or awakened maiden and lover to the sweetness of domestic bliss. One could almost hear the throbbing of the world's great heart and the breathings of the everlasting hills. It was a day of great significance to all who dwelt in that hill country. Court was about to convene,

and already the red highways leading into the town echoed the hoofs of hurrying steeds and the shouts of the mountaineers. What man of woman born would willingly absent himself from the great concourse which invariably assembled on the village green on the opening day of court? Not that these mountain folk were personally concerned in the administration of law, for not one in a hundred had lawyer to fee or wrong to right. Court week was a sort of semi-annual round-up where far separated acquaintances came to renew their friendships, form new ties or settle animosities in the usual way. What the muster was to the fathers and the county fair to the rural populations farther north, court week was to the dwellers of these North Carolina strongholds.

And so on this pure, crystal morning they came down out of the mountains and up out of the valleys, and seemingly from the very dens and caves of the earth. They swarmed from everywhere. Gloomy recesses, untrodden by foot of tourist, yielded up their bearded dwellers, and, mounted on carts or wagons, ox-hauled or ass-drawn, they crowded the highways and byways heading toward the little mountain town. They came riding in singles and doubles, in pairs and in squads, on mule back, horse back and cow back; men bearded to the eyes and men, like the priest in the nursery rhyme, all shaven and shorn; mustached men, goateed men, bright-eyed and sullen-eyed; men in shirt sleeves and men in blouses; men straw-hat-

ted, and no hatted; hats broad-brimmed, narrow-brimmed and no-brimmed; men with lunch baskets on their arms and women with balloon-shaped pokes hung from their saddle horns; silent men, noisy men, men whose laughter made the hills reëcho and men whose brows were like the storm-clouds on the brow of Thunder Cliff; women whose faces were furrowed like the hill-slopes or fair as a June landscape when the first fruits are ripening.

Thus they came, these men and women of the mountains, until the groves nearby were filled with whinnying steeds or clogged with paintless carts and wagons, while groups of garrulous neighbors puffed their pipes, exchanged lugubrious wit, pulled their harness from their steeds and threw it beyond the reach of inconsiderate hoofs.

The court house square was filled with men and women in pleasant mood, the men circulating over the green or chatting in friendly groups, while their wives and daughters, sisters and sweet-hearts, clad in picturesque attire, mingled with the throng or gossiped on the benches beneath the trees. It was a rough and ready crowd with no frills and no hypocrisy: a people near to nature's heart—indeed, too near. They grasped each other's hands, smiled, chatted and mumbled unconsidered lies like other people, vaunted their local heroisms and crowed over their own exploits.

Big Perk Thompson was the observed of all observers. He was most gorgeous in his attire, and caused many a smile among the maidens and an occasional guffaw among the men. His suit was of Antwerp blue. His beard was long and bushy with a sporadic streak of grey. His hair fell on his shoulders and he wore a greasy, broad-brimmed slouch hat. Perk Thompson was straight as an arrow and moved through the crowd with an air of importance. His pipe was a cob with a section of grapevine inserted. He was in ill humor because of the side glances and tittering of the women and the awful wit of the men. He was pretty near the limit of endurance, as anyone might have known by the volumes of smoke that encircled his scowling face. Perk was a Union man, and in the absence of the blue of the Northern army, he pressed his old Antwerp suit into service, and it had become the target of friend and foe alike. Terbaccy Tom came along, with his gun, and seeing the gorgeous suit with which Perk was empanoplied, it was too much for him, and he stood there, gazing at Perk, and grinning like a gargoyle, and shook till the cartridge box fairly rattled in his pocket.

"Heavings and earth, what a frock!" burst from his lips as he roared with uncontrollable laughter.

Perk shot out his muscular fist and landed full on Tom's face and sent him spinning like a top. "I've just been waitin' fer some old shanghai to

cackle about that air suit! It's allus safe fer fools t' keep their mouths shet," and he glowered down at his victim as Jay Grimp stooped to help him to his feet.

"This is only borrered, Perk!" Tom muttered as he rubbed the blood from his face.

"Yer free to return it any day, now ef yer wanter. This blue sleeve's allus loaded fer men like you who goes among his neighbors with a gun on his shoulder."

"Ther'll be another day, Perk Thompson, when yer blue clothes won't save yer! Put that in yer cob, ye ol' blue-backed crab!" shouted Tom, with a shameless disregard for his figures of speech, as he started to move away.

"Ye don't need t' wait. I'm right here. Put down yer gun," and Perk flung his blue coat on the grass. "I jest wanter get a good chance at some o' you roving traitors," and Perk started to follow, but was restrained by his friends.

"Let him go," said Snickerby.

"We've gotter pluck th' feathers offin these buzzards whenever we ketch 'em."

"Oyes—Oyes!" shouted the court crier from a window in the second story of the court house, "Court-is-now-in-session-and-all-people-havin'-business-afore-said-court-will-come-this-way!" and the window went down with a bang.

Part of the crowd began surging toward the entrance, but many remained beneath the trees. At this moment a change was given to the day's pro-

ceedings for many. A tall, gaunt man, with a beard of snowy whiteness falling over his bosom and drifting about his shoulders, ascended the court house steps and stood facing the crowd. His eyes were black and piercing as an eagle's and looked out from beneath the long thatches of his brows, as with stentorian voice he called the crowd to give attention. It was the Rev. William Watchcob.

"Mah fren's," said he, "it be put upon me t' proclaim th' funnral of Seloe Stybright, who died two year ago t'morrer. Th' funnral will be preached at th' grave o' Seloe this atternoon at two by th' clock. It war announced at th' big meetin' on th' Sunday just past two weeks ago t' take place th' first Sunday follerin' th' third Satterday o' this month, which'd be next Sunday; but fer reasons which th' bereft Guy will make known at th' funnral, th' time am changed to this atternoon."

What a hubbub the announcement caused. It set hundreds of tongues wagging. It gave the crowd a new theme on which to amplify, and scores of them lost all interest in the proceedings upstairs. Seloe Stybright had been dead for two years.

"Funny thing this," whispered one woman to another.

"Not a bit funny. That's the way down here."

"Don't yer preach th' funnral when the pusion dies?"

"Not ginnerally. It may be preached when th' mourners git ready."

"An' do yer keep th' corpse in th' house all this while?"

"Naw. Th' burryin' takes place a few hours attter death; but th' funneral preachin' may be months, er may be years, attter th' burryin'."

"That's a strange way o' doin', seems t' me."

"Funny thing happened last week. Nappy Jones been dead more'n a year; an' th' parson came to do th' preachin', an' what do you think? Th' widdy Jones was thar wid her second man, an' she a leanin' on his arm listenin' to her fust husband's vartues."

"An' this Stybright woman's been in th' grave two years?"

"Jesso; but Guy needn't a been in sich a hurry with th' preachin'."

The festivities of the day were changed for many. The funeral had equal attraction for the crowds. Many remained to hear the chaffering of the attorneys upstairs, but more repaired to the plateau where the body of Seloe lay. There was bustle among the carts and wagons as men threw the harness on their animals and hooked them up to their cumbersome vehicles and jogged over the rough highway. Scores of them hastened on foot, carrying their meal pokes with them.

The old preacher led the way and called to the people to follow. The court crier cried in

vain. He raised his window, rang his bell, shouted his "Oyes, Oyes" over the heads of the people; but soon called to a deserted campus.

It was a picturesque scene there upon the mountain side that bright afternoon. The narrow "shelf" literally swarmed with men, women and children in many-hued attire. It was a veritable flower garden in ever-changing color, a sort of human kaleidoscope moving in ever-varying situations. There was little to indicate the solemnity of a funeral. The preacher rose by the side of the grave and a hush fell on the throng as everyone recognized his interesting presence. His eyes glowed beneath his angular brows. His snow-white beard was the sport of the winds as it drifted about his face and shoulders like shredded silk. He was loud in his praise of the dead, and when he had finished the "preachin'," he called upon Guy Stybright and Gyp to come forward. And there by the two-year-old grave friends and neighbors came forward, one by one, and expressed their sympathy and dropped words of consolation into the ears of father and son.

The minister once more arose, and stretching his long right arm and skinny forefinger into the air, said:

"The 'flicted husband bids me say t' th' people that, t' save time an' th' comin' t'gither o' his many frien's some other day, he an' Selma Lumbo have made up to be jined in holy mattermony; an' as it is nobody's business but their'n there

hain't nuthin' in the way. So if th' people will be still I'll jine 'em. Guy an' Selma will arise, come for'ard an' be jined."

And there by the grave of Seloe the afflicted husband entered his second state.

CHAPTER X

AN APPARITION

SELMA STYBRIGHT was a good second to Seloe. Stronger in character, less yielding, she was able to hold her own against the world. But for all that she was a cheerful, home-loving, good-natured soul. She busied herself in her new home as if she had always ruled it. It did not take her long to get accustomed to its internal affairs, or to obtain an inventory of her new possessions. A sweep of the rafters with her not incurious eyes, where strips of bacon, hoops of sausage and bunches of withered herbs hung; a glance into the three-cornered cupboard with its few poor possessions; a survey of the mantel-shelf with its snuff-sticks and tobacco cans; a hasty look around the scantily furnished room, with its one bed in the farther corner and Gyp's couch stretched on the floor by its side, like a lion's cub at the feet of its mother, and her task was completed. She had entered into her kingdom, thankful that she had done so well.

It was a drowsy evening, long months after the picturesque marriage at the grave of Seloe, and the three members of the Stybright home were seated by the open fire-place. A bed of coals

was on the hearth. Selma arose, and going to a table by the wall, busied herself with preparing a loaf for breakfast.

"Paw, did yer see that?"

"See what, Gyp?"

"That face at th' winder?"

"I seed no face."

"Paw, I seed a face clus by th' glass. It was a awful ugly face. It looked like Snags."

"Snags Groucher!" and Guy Stybright leaped to his feet. "What's that she rebel doin' here!" and he ran to the door, went out into the darkness and looked all about the house, but could see no one.

"Nobody thar, Gyp," he said as he returned to his place by the open hearth.

"Paw, I seed that 'ar face as plain as yourn."

"I heered somethin' crashin' down through the bushes by th' run—but it might-a-been a hawg," Stybright nodded, as he twisted off a chew of tobacco and thrust the plug into his trouser pocket.

"An' it might-a-been Snags. My, but she looked ugly!"

Selma continued at her dough, her dress pinned behind her and her sleeves rolled to her elbows. Guy looked at her with a feeling of self-congratulation as he saw her thrust her white knuckles into the batter. He felt that there were circumstances in which he might have done very much worse. That was as far as he dared to trust himself and as near as he ever came to ex-

pressing his affection. He smiled complaisantly as he deposited a mouthful of saliva among the coals which Selma had drawn into place to heat her oven. Then he dropped off into a doze, with his elbows on his knees and his chin on his palms, occasionally nodding or glowering dreamily toward the glowing coals. Gyp was seated with his head in his sleeve and his arm on the back of his chair, asleep. There was no speech between the drowsy husband and wife. Garrulity was not a part of their united fortunes. The only sound that broke the stillness was the plunging of Selma's fists into the bread bowl and the heavy breathing of Gyp with his nose in the angle of his arm.

The door was shoved open and Wade Hampton entered.

"Never mind, Stybright," said he, "don't rise, I can wait only a minute."

"Glad t' see yer, Hampton; come in."

"I only want a bite to eat, and then I must hasten on."

"Gwine North? Selma, git 'im a bite."

"Yes, and I fear I am being followed. I have no time to lose."

"I'll throw yer hoss a few nubbins while ye're eatin' yer pone."

"W'at makes yer think ye're bein' follered?" Guy asked on his return.

Without answering the question directly, Hampton inquired:

"Have you seen Terbaccy Tom or Snags Groucher in this neighborhood recently?"

Gyp and the father looked significantly at each other.

"I told yer, paw," Gyp nodded.

"Th' boy sez he seed a face at th' winder."

"When did he see it?"

"Th' night, an' it looked like Snagses."

"No doubt it was she, and it bodes no good for any of us."

"W'at be she a doin' erroun' here?"

"She's a traitor, Guy, she's a traitor; and Tom, you know, is both a traitor and a villain."

"He be one of th' worst on these mountings."

"That is true. He has no more regard for the life of a Union man or woman than you have for a catamount. We must beware of both."

"As they hain't a showin' us no mercy, we hain't none in their debt. I hain't a goin' out any more 'ithout me shootin' irons."

"What time was Snags here?"

"About an hour ago."

"It is a good thing for me that I was not here when she looked through the window, and perhaps well for all of us."

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation, and Guy jumped for his gun, took it from its hooks on the wall, and shouted:

"Come in!"

The door swung slowly open and a ghastly apparition stood before them. Selma screamed

and raised her hands in alarm. Hampton sprang to his feet and drew his pistol from his pocket. Both men glared at the stranger. Before them stood a pitiable object of humanity, as gaunt and haggard as ever darkened the door of a mountaineer. He was wasted to a skeleton. His cheeks were sunken until every tooth seemed outlined against the flesh. His eyes glared out of their sockets with a luster that was startling. He was hatless, and his unkempt hair stood out from his head in a tangled shock. He was shirtless, and his tattered blouse and pantaloons hung loose upon him like the rags on a scarecrow. He had neither shoes nor stockings, and his trousers were frayed to ribbons at the knees. If Seloe had come down from her grave on the little plateau above the cabin and appeared in her shroud they could not have been more startled.

The stranger raised his thin, wasted arm and bracing himself against the doorpost, looked with his deep, burning eyes straight into the amazed face of Stybright, as he said:

"Union or Confederate?"

Guy threw his hand upon the trigger, raised his gun to his shoulder as he thundered back:

"Union or C'nfed'rate, say I?"

"Oh, Guy, Guy!" shrieked Selma, as she ran to him and with her hands covered with dough, grasped the gun and pushed it out of range. "He's Union, Guy; he's Union! Don't yer see th' blue on 'im?"

"Yes, I'm a soldier of the Union, escaped from one of the Southern prisons."

"Well, yer among frien's," Guy responded as he hung his gun on the wall.

There was a hurrying to make the stranger welcome. Hampton advanced at once to grasp his hand, and Guy, as soon as he had hung up his gun, was enthusiastic in his hospitality. Selma hastened to set before her guests all that her poor accommodations could afford.

"W'at's yer name, Mister?" Gyp abruptly asked, as he stood by the side of the chair and looked up into the haggard face of the stranger.

"Jack Conway; and you can see by these tattered colors that I belong to the Northern army."

"Where did yer come from?" Guy asked.

"Salisbury."

"And how did yer git here? Did yer come alone? Did nobody help yer?"

"God was with me, and good friends helped me or I never could have come over that long distance. When I escaped I was scarcely able to walk; yet the thought of being free—out under God's own sky, black though it was, filled me with abounding hope. It felt like heaven. It was the happiest hour I ever knew."

"And was yer all alone in the darkness? My, how'd ye git along? Didn't they git after ye?" and Gyp continued to ask one question after another.

"I was alone, my boy; and could only trust

God and stumble on into the moonless solitude of the night. But I was free; and that gave me courage. I praised the Almighty for the night and the pathless darkness. I thanked Him that the gossiping stars were hidden and that his hand had veiled the telltale moon."

Selma had stopped kneading her bread and stood with her back to the wall and her white arms folded gazing with wide open astonishment at the speaker. Gyp had subsided into silence, while Guy ground his teeth at the recital of the inhumanity which his guest had received.

"Th' vipers! I'd skin 'em alive!" and he landed a mouthful of saliva in the fireplace.

"Did you have great difficulty in finding your way to friends?" was asked by Wade Hampton, who found himself so interested in the story of Conway that he forgot that he himself was in flight to escape the fury of the South.

"Sometimes I floundered and fell, as my feet were caught by confederated vines, but I arose and stumbled on, tunneling my way farther and farther into the friendly chaos of the night. I saw at length a light in the distance. It shone like the headlight of a locomotive boring its way through the hospitable silence. But I saw that it was stationary. It made a path for me through the darkness, and I headed straight for it as one might walk into the face of a star. When I reached it, I found it to be, as I had hoped, the window of a negro's cabin."

"Then you knew that you had found friends! These poor slaves have always been friendly to the old flag. I have never yet been disappointed by one of them," and Hampton looked at Stybright, assured that he would confirm his statement.

"I never saw a disloyal nigger," and the fireplace was replenished with another volley, as Guy turned and inquired of Mr. Conway: "The niggers were ready ter help yer?"

"Yes, they were. As I came up to the cabin I saw on the wide hearth an old mammy busying herself with the morning meal. By her side a swarthy old man bent over the fire and was filling his pipe. As I rapped both turned and looked at me with a startled expression.

"'Fo' de Lawd, Sambo, yits anodder o' dem Linkum sojers!' came from the mammy.

"'Git back dar in de shadder!' Sambo called, as he came toward me, and closed the door as he came out. He told me that the Confederate spies were prowling about the neighborhood. Then he took me into the house, and as there were no shades on the windows, he placed a quilt before the fire to screen the light. A rude table was in the center of the room; this he shoved to one side, and said to me:

"'Massa Sojer, yo's not safe hyar a minit!' He then lifted a tattered square of carpet on which the table had stood, and under the carpet was a trap door.

"'Down hyar, an' be quick'n all the grey backs in de Souf'll nebbeh git yer.' Following his directions I slowly worked my way backward down a crude pole-ladder and found myself in utter darkness. 'Lots o' good fellehs been down dar afore ye, Massa. De Lawd's good angels'll feed yer bimeby.'"

"Did ye ever hear th' likes o' that?" and Selma turned to her husband with an approving look. "Who'd a thunk it?"

"I'm a thinkin' that the Lord will have extra crowns for old Sambo and Chloe when the time comes," said Hampton.

"It was mighty well done fer two old niggers!" and Guy twisted off another chew, as he added, "Oh, them vipers!"

"As my eyes began to adapt themselves to the situation, I found a chair and a rude cot awaiting me," continued Conway. "In a moment I was sound asleep, and never was slumber more refreshing to the weary than to me in that hole in the ground under the cabin floor. Here they kept me and fed me for two days and then Sambo piloted me a night's journey, and guided by his instruction I made my way through the mountains until I knocked at your hospitable door this evening."

"There are dangers on every hand. We are in the midst of perils. There is not one of us safe. We must either flee to the North, or arm ourselves and hide in the mountains, and there

make our defense until the war is over," commented Hampton when Conway had finished.

"It's either shoot or be shot," was Stybright's laconic answer.

"An', paw, I believe Snags is around here to-night," commented Gyp.

"Never mind, boy, she'll not come around to-night. She's too big a coward. If she saw you lookin' at her through the winder, she'll know that weuns'll be on the lookout fer her, an' she'll not show up th' night."

Hampton rose, examined his ammunition and his gun, and then saying good-night, passed out into the darkness.

That night as Conway lay dreaming on his rude straw bed on the floor, Gyp, who could not sleep for thinking over his thrilling story, rolled over toward him and raising himself on his elbow, looked down into the tired, wan face and said:

"Don't ye worry, Mister, weuns'll see yer through."

CHAPTER XI

BETWEEN TWO FLAGS

EAGER as Conway was to see the old flag and get beyond the possibility of recapture, he recognized the necessity of remaining, and, with gratitude to the lowly couple for their proffered hospitality, he made himself content. But the time came when his longing to be away was gratified. Gyp knew the paths of the mountains, the resorts of the "guerrillas," as well as the homes of the loyal mountaineers. He volunteered to be Mr. Conway's guide. But Conway hesitated to place himself under the protection of one who seemed so youthful in appearance and apparently unfitted to cope with possible dangers.

"Mister," said Gyp, with an air of injured innocence, "my maw tol' me about a boy onct that killed a lion and a b'ar, and 'e wern't much bigger'n I be. The same feller hit a big giant on th' head 'ith a stone an' knocked th' feller over, then 'e jumped on 'im an' cut his head off. Don't yer think a boy knows nawthin'?"

"He wer' born t' th' mountings," his father added, "an' 'e kin find a path out o' danger as a squir'l finds its way f'm one tree to another or as a bee flies home over the hills."

"Don't yer worry, Mister, weuns'll see yer through."

"What about arms?" Conway inquired.

"'Twon't do no harm t' fotch 'em along," Gyp replied.

"Guns is allus in place in time o' war," Guy added.

That night Gyp led Conway into the camps where the loyalists were "lying out." Some of these men were deserters from the Southern army, men who would not fight against the old flag, and, with the loyal mountaineers, made common cause of their patriotism.

Gyp and Conway passed one cabin after another. Some of them were deserted, and in none of them did they discover any light. These cabins were perched on narrow terraces or on the banks of secluded streams; they were hidden among scrawny trees on the stumpy edges of timberless tracts, or in little "clearings" where the thin soil had scarcely felt the point of the plow.

At one of these rude houses they stopped. It was built of rough logs, and, within, was devoid of ornament and of every indication of culture. There was but one window, a square opening cut in the end of the building, without glass or sash, and was closed by a coarse board-shutter which swung to its place on wooden hinges. Gyp approached it cautiously, motioning to Conway to remain behind. He gave a signal like the bleating of a sheep, repeating it three times.

The door creaked on its wooden hinges and swung slowly open. There was no light within, and but little without, only the faint grey which filtered through the trees; yet therein Gyp could dimly discern the outlines of a tall man in the doorway. He was bare-headed and his hair hung on his shoulders. In spite of the darkness Gyp recognized the tall form of the Rev. William Watchcob.

"May weuns come in a bit, preacher?"

"Come in, Gyp," the loyal minister replied, recognizing the voice of the boy. "This shack's open to anyone who gives that signal. Come in."

"We've gotter be mighty keerful," the preacher informed Conway after the door had been closed.

"Is the danger so very great?" Conway inquired.

"It is great. They are after us, and we are just waitin' our chance. They are hidden about somewhere, and we are liable to be shot at any moment. We're not a molestin' anyone; but if them guerrillas come a searchin' our houses an' a shootin' us men, jest because we be loyal to the old flag, then it's man hunt man and Death gets th' fellow what's off guard. Sometimes it's the man in grey that's found with a hole in his head, and sometimes it's the man in blue. It's a mighty ticklish business, stranger."

"It's a terrible situation," sighed Conway as he thought of the peril of these loyal people.

"When warned of danger men flee to the bush," Watchcob continued, "their wives or other members of the family, creep out in the night and carry 'em food, and keep 'em informed as well 's they can of any movements o' th' enemy of which they may hear. The children be of'n made to do picket duty. A young girl carelessly pickin' strawberries or searchin' for lady-slippers is in reality a little sentinel on duty watchin' some road over which the enemy might come. Or some lad with his bow and arrows strolls out, as if he were a huntin' game, but he allus keeps in view the broad highway, that, like a yellow or reddish storm-fed stream, winds in and out far down the mounting side."

"The danger here," Conway suggested, "is almost as great as at the front."

"The danger t' home is greater, an' t' life it be as uncertain."

The preacher's voice was interrupted by the entrance of Big Perk Thompson, still wearing his gorgeous Antwerp blue.

"'Nother home gone," was his first exclamation, as he set his gun in the corner. "That devil, Terbaccy Tom, 'll not fire any more build-in's for awhile."

"Did ye git him?"

"I sent him down the mounting with some lead in his back. He'll at least think the fleas be bad in the neighborhood of his spinal column for some days t' come."

"W'at's 'e been a doin'?" Gyp asked.

"I caught him runnin' from Hank Hummel's home atter he had set it afire, and I sent some cayenne pepper atter him."

"I seed 'im set fire to th' ole ghost house th' night th' preacher an' me went t' hunt th' ghosts," Gyp excitedly replied, recalling the conflagration on that eventful night.

"That is true," the preacher added. "I saw the villain run f'm the house after he had applied the torch. He'd burn a home as quick as a pile of leaves. This neighborhood 'll not be safe until that man is either shot or hung." The old minister spoke with an emphasis which caused Perk Thompson to sneer.

"And Snags Groucher is just as bad."

"Worse," echoed the preacher.

"She was with him when he fired the Hummel home. I c'd have shot her; but I didn't dare shoot a woman, though the time may come when we will have to."

"Treason knows no sex," remarked Conway.

"She has betrayed our men to death and burned their homes, an' it must be our duty to arrest her and keep her under guard until this thing is settled. If walls and chains will not keep her, then we will use th' rope."

"She has long since forfeited her life. But for th' sake of her sex we will spare her, unless further depredations and bloodshed on her part call for the sacrifice. But we'll try th' prison

first. It seems such an awful thing to shoot a woman."

"True fer you, preacher, but we must save our homes from the torch, and our wives and children from being burned alive. A woman who will do this hain't fit t' live."

Conway listened to the recital of the perils of the mountaineers and learned what these non-combatants had to endure for liberty. He saw the light of the burning home shimmering above the trees. He saw these men who were walking arsenals, each with a trusty rifle, a great bowie-knife, haversack and canteen. He looked into their honest faces, and thought of the sacrifices for freedom that were made in the land of the South; but his reverie was cut short by Gyp, as he said:

"Better be a goin', Conway."

The two passed out into the darkness, and up a long swinging path that doubled in and out of ravines ever climbing higher and higher.

"Yer won't be noways skert if I show yer?"

"No, Gyp; what is it you wish to show me?" Conway answered, a little curious as to what Gyp had to attract his attention at that hour of the night.

Gyp crooked his finger as a sign for him to follow. He then led off through the thickets and jungles of laurel where there was no path, and soon came into an open clearing, along one side of which ran a high ledge of rocks. On the top

of the ledge a lone tree stood out in silhouette. Gyp stopped, laid his hand on Conway's arm and pointing toward the spectral tree, whispered into his ear:

"That's him!"

Looking up Conway saw the dark form of a man swinging like a plummet from the spectral pine. It was clearly outlined against the background of sky, and was enough to make one's blood run cold. Gyp relieved the tension by saying:

"He hadn't orter been a pokin' around a shootin' of us fellers."

The young man's sense of horror had been chilled by the fearful exigencies of war. He thought no more of such a ghastly sight than of a dead crow hanging to a stake in the cornfield.

"Gyp, this is awful. Who is it?"

"Secesh."

"What did he do?"

"Shooted a Unioner down hyar, an' thar he be a regrettin' of it."

"How long has he been there?"

"Oh, a right smart spell."

"What an awful thing is war!" exclaimed the old soldier, not unmindful of the terrible experiences through which he himself had so recently passed.

With that they turned back into the thicket and the two soon regained the trail. As they

climbed the dark slope they passed the charred ruins of a cabin on their right. Gyp said to Conway as they were passing:

"Tha's all gone, every one on 'em, dad an' four boys. One of 'em died in a rebel dungeon. A 'nother in a prison down in Alabamy. Two of 'em started fer th' North t' jine th' Union army an' th' g'rillars got 'em an' shot 'em an' killed 'em an' left 'em on th' field fer bugs an' birds t' eat. An' one night th' ole man an' his wumman wer a sittin' eatin' ther taters, 'sturbin' no one, an' them g'rillars shooted in at th' winder an' killed 'em both. Then they burnt th' house on 'em. An I know 'at Snags an' Terbaccy Tom was back of it. Yer needn't wonder that Perk Thompson thinks she oughter be hung. Th' folks what burned it was kitched, all 'cept Snags and Tom, an' tha' didn't have no time t' say, 'now I lay me!' If tha lets us alone weuns ain't a 'sturbin' nobody. But w'en tha keep a huntin' us like coons an' foxes, an' shootin' us an' burnin' weunses houses, tha's jes' gotter look out. Th' Lord's agin a secesh, an' so be I."

Gyp pointed out to Conway log stables, and barns made of thin poles, in the lofts of which they might have seen rolls of blankets and coarse mattresses, the property of those who were lying out. But the two passed on in silence.

The morning was beginning to show grey in the eastern horizon as they came down a lonely path to where a little river lay before them. Gyp,

with a backward movement of his hand toward Conway, said:

"Stay hyar."

He then crept softly to the edge of the water and listened. He looked up and down the shore, but in the dim light of the morning he could see nothing. Then he imitated the cry of a screech-owl. In a little while he heard the muffled dip of oars, and a shadowy boat came out of the darkness and pulled alongside.

"I have been expecting you."

The voice was that of a young person, indeed it sounded almost childlike, and Conway was astonished when he saw a bit of a girl with loose flowing hair and rosy cheeks step from the boat.

"We must not detain a moment," she said softly. "There is danger." They took their places in the boat and she pulled into the stream. They were soon on the opposite bank of the river, where they stepped ashore and the boat was drawn up under heavy, overhanging branches. They made their way along a gloomy forest path, guided by this young heroine, to her father's cabin. It was only a short distance from the shore, but so completely enshrouded by dense foliage that its location would not be suspected by anyone prowling along the river bank. And yet it was so near that this little Miss could hear Gyp's prearranged signal. When they reached the cabin it was both dark and empty.

"Who be you? Aida?" It was the first time

that any of them had spoken since leaving the farther side of the river.

"Yes, Gyp. I am Aida, the little girl you found gathering rhododendrons on the mountain side. But we must not detain. The enemy have been shadowing these parts for days. Our men are all in the bush. We will go there at once."

CHAPTER XII

TRAGEDY OF THE TWIN OAKS

CONWAY was brought safely into the camp of the refugees and left in the care of Union men. Gyp and Aida saw much of each other. Their acquaintance ripened wonderfully. They were one and inseparable. The woodland rambles were for them alone. But the stay of the Sty-bright boy was necessarily brief; his errand accomplished he must hasten his return; and one evening when the shadows fell and the stars came out they were alone by the river bank. Gyp was returning, and as they were about to shove the boat into the stream they heard the sound of horses' feet galloping on the opposite side of the river. Aida laid her hand on Gyp's arm with an admonitory "h-u-s-h!" Then the sound of the hurrying hoofs died away and the boat was thrust out from its leafy canopy and rowed noiselessly to the other side. No word was spoken, lest the very winds which fanned their cheeks might prove traitors to their hopes.

Gyp wanted to speak. He wished to tell his fair pilot the great happiness which he felt; but he knew that silence was wiser than speech. There was an atmosphere about his heart which was

new and strange to him, and which did not wholly arise from a sense of gratitude. He hardly knew how to describe it, yet he knew it was a mighty comfortable feeling for a young fellow to have; and somehow he felt more at peace with the world in that little shell of a boat than the circumstances seemed to justify. He longed to take the oars from those fair hands and row away with Aida to some enchanted isle beyond the sound of war and the hate of men. But he thought it a most delightful experience to be wholly in her hands. He had no difficulty in resigning himself to the bliss of the situation.

The boat glided softly under the boughs and came to rest. Gyp stepped lightly ashore lest the snapping of a twig or the crackling of dead leaves might loosen an avalanche of armed men. In the darkness he managed to lay his hand on Aida's and press his thanks for braving the dangers of the night for his sake. There was a low swash of water among the reeds, and, with a whispered good-bye, he was alone. The boat slipped away over the water as softly as the swimming of a swan.

On the return journey Gyp avoided the main road as much as possible, and when it became necessary for him to follow it his step was as light as the foot of a sparrow in the snow. Sometime toward midnight he came out of the woods, left the narrow foot-path and entered the open road. He knew there was danger, yet in that

part of the mountains it seemed the only way for him to take, and he trusted to darkness and good luck.

The highway took a little downward pitch and twisted around the end of a stone spring-house where the swing of the hill led to a strip of fringing willows. He knew by the tall, undefined mass of oaks, by the dip of the hill and the shadowy rampart of willows just where he was. Above the road he saw a blur on the hill slope which he knew to be a farm house. He stood for a moment to listen, then hurried on. A few hours would bring him home.

He darted into the deeper shadows of the oaks, and stumbled over some obstruction in his path. He rallied, stumbled again and this time fell. His hand struck something soft and yielding, as when one lays his hand on a fur robe that has been folded, or as when a child lies down with its head on a dog.

He raised himself on his knees and moved his hand cautiously over the dark object whose outlines he could not see. It felt like a human being! The touch was like that of clothing, a coat or jacket, he knew not what. His fingers ran into a bunch of hair and then—his blood ran cold. In spite of all his previous caution he cried:

"It's a man! It's a man!"

Then, his blood still tingling in his veins, he felt the cold face, moved his trembling fingers into the sockets of the eyes. The clothes were

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moist, the hair was clammy and sticky. It was blood, coagulated blood!

"Murder! murder!"

His voice trembled. There was a suppressed cry mingled with fear and horror. He leaped to his feet, only to stumble over another dead body, and still another; but whether friends or foes he could not tell.

He ran to that dull blur on the hillside, fell against a low fence, rose, climbed the hill and rapped furiously on the door. After much knocking, and the loud barking of chained dogs, a sash was raised and a head thrust out of an upper window:

"What's the matter down there?"

"It's murder! murder! Somebody's been killed down here under the big trees!"

"And who be you?"

"Get a light, quick! Tha's three men dead! Hurry up an' come down hyar!"

"Who be you, anyway? Speak or I'll set the dogs on yer."

"I'm Gyp; Gyp Stybright. Hurry up."

"Well you'd better go home and mind yer own business or ther'll be four down thar 'stead o' three!"

"O Snags! Snags!—"

The window came down with a bang. Gyp knew the voice of the syren and that the dogs would be on him in a moment unless he fled. He ran, as best he could through the darkness, to

the cabin of Perk Thompson and the old preacher, and reached it so exhausted and terrified that he could scarcely speak. The neighborhood was soon aroused. They knew that the dead under the twin oaks were Union men. There was no other inference from the hate of Snags Groucher. An armed band was soon hastening toward the scene of the tragedy. As they reached the oaks a dark lantern was held down to the blood-stained faces of the dead. Thompson took the light and held it close to the nearest body. He saw what he feared, but he reached down his hand and turned the face of the dead where it lay in a matrix of blood. Then he sprang upright, swung his lantern in the air and shrieked:

"Vengeance! Vengeance! It's the Jennings boys and Guy Stybright; it's poor Guy Stybright! Now come the vengeance of the Lord!"

CHAPTER XIII

OH THE PITY OF IT!

GYP kneeled down and took the blood-stained head of his father in his hands and wept until those fierce men turned away their faces. Little weeping had they done for many a year; but the sight of that poor boy kneeling there in his father's blood, the pitiful face tortured in the paroxysms of death, trying, by the dim light of the lantern, to wipe away the sand and blood from his face, caused those men to turn aside into the darkness and sob like little children. But it was only for a moment. The awful horror and iniquity of the tragedy turned their hearts to stone and their tears to ice.

Stybright and two of his neighbors had evidently been hanged and then shot. The ghastly work completed, the bodies had been cut down and left where they fell.

The first impulse of the mountaineers was to burn and burn until not a home or hiding place belonging to this murderous crew were left standing—to shoot, to hang and club to death, until, like rattlesnakes, the whole “hissing brood of vipers” was destroyed. The same measure which they had meted would be measured unto them.

"Let us first take care of our dead," Parson Watchcob suggested. "These murderers can be dealt with later."

"Their blood'll flow for this awful crime!" hissed Perk Thompson, and he turned and looked toward the shadowy farmhouse on the hillside.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," roared Sykes Snickerby.

"The vengeance of the Lord can wait," replied the minister.

"Did ye ever read this, preacher, 'whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed?' That's my creed till every haunt of these murderers is cleaned out." Saying this, Snickerby stooped down and laid hold of Stybright, saying, "Come on boys. Let us carry them away from this accursed spot."

It was a solemn procession that filed through the forests that sad morning, bearing with little speech and much revengeful thought their pathetic burden. At the home of the two murdered brothers they left their dead until their bodies could be decently laid away to rest.

Not until they reached this place had they discovered that Perk Thompson and Sykes Snickerby were not with them. As one of the men stood in the doorway he discovered a great light in the west. It shone like a blaze of sunset over the mountains. There were pulsing waves of fire which beat against the sloping roof of the heavens till the whole firmament blushed.

"Fire! fire! There's a burnin' beyond the hill," exclaimed the preacher, as he shaded his eyes with his hand and watched the pulsations of light along the horizon.

"That's some o' Perk's doin's," Mark Dawson replied, as he stood with Stybright's bloody coat in his hand, looking over the preacher's shoulder. "Perk's up to somethin'."

"Do ye think he's back o' that?"

"Dunno; but when I took his place at th' first turn after leavin' th' oaks I heerd him say: 'Curse that hillside brood!' an' I ha'n't see him sence."

Dawson and two others ran to the crest of the mountain and looked toward the west. Flames were pouring through the windows of a distant dwelling. It stood on the edge of a great forest, and by the light of the burning home they could see a broad road that writhed across the landscape. There were trees at the top of the hill where the road dropped into the valley, and at the foot of the hill there was a little white building.

"That's the house," said Dawson, "Perk's got his work in."

"What house? What's Perk been a doin'?"

"The house whar Snags threatened to set the dogs on Gyp. Perk and Sykes got 'em all right."

"Think Sykes's in that, too?"

"Ha'n't seen him for an hour. Whar'd ye suppose he'd go? Sykes wouldn't a run away

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from helpin' to carry th' dead 'lest he had important business."

"Ther' don't seem to be nobody about th' house."

"Ther' ha'n't nobody t' be about th' house," echoed Perk himself, as he and Sykes Snickerby came suddenly on them from a by-path.

"Perk w'at you been a doin'?"

"Been a settlin' up Guy Stybright's estate."

"Payin' his bills, be you?"

"One of them's paid, anyhow."

"He makes a mighty prompt executioner," laughed Sykes.

"Y' mean executor," tittered Dawson.

"Naw: executioner's the word. It reaches th' spot quicker," was Sykes' retort.

"He won't bother no more Unioners, the villain," Perk added, pointing toward the burning home and bunch of trees by the roadside.

"Who won't?" Mark Dawson inquired.

"That scoundrel, Terbaccy Tom."

"What did ye do to him?"

"D'ye see them trees 'way over yander?"

"Over where we found Stybright?"

"Yes: d'ye see 'em?"

"I do."

"Well ast them what's th' matter with Terbaccy Tom. They won't tell no lies."

"They've sure seen enough for one night, them trees hez."

"We swung 'im up by th' same rope that Sty-

bright was hung with," Perk continued by way of information.

"An' w'at sort of a motto d'ye s'pose Perk tacked onto him?" Sykes inquired.

"Dunno."

"Hung a board about his neck, and on it he wrote: 'As you measure to your neighbor he will measure back to you.'"

"There was one on 'em got away that ought to be a hangin' beside him."

"Who was that?"

"That she rebel, Snags Groucher."

"Yer wouldn't a hanged a woman, would yer?"

"Dunno. She settled th' question by gettin' away," lamented Sykes.

"It was a mighty delicate dee-fickulty that was got out'n th' way when she sneaked into the woods," Perk added.

CHAPTER XIV

DESOLATION

GYP hastened away to tell Selma the awful tidings, while others sped through the fastnesses to tell among the loyal cabins the story of the brutal murders. The morning had fully dawned when Gyp struck the old familiar trail that led down to the house. The east glowed with radiance. The lowing of cattle and the barking of dogs in the valley below came to his ears like memories of other days before this awful grief rived his heart. It all seemed in such contrast to the hideous scenes of the past few hours. The sweet dream of Aida on the water which only a little while ago filled his soul with rapture and the awful thing that had since happened was like the mixing of heaven and hell in equal parts. But the awful tumult of the tragedy had, for the time, blotted from his soul the sweet apocalypse of love.

He came around the hill in full view of the narrows, in which his home was located. The great chasm was filled with that soft grey mist which trails along the hill-slopes when the rains and the nights are gone. Ragged edges of smoke jutted into the lateral valleys and hung lazily

there as if their wings were weighted. Gyp entered the languorous smoke-belt. The air was full of the odor of charred timber, as when one throws a pail of water on wood embers. He thought of the fireside at home, and of Selma preparing breakfast for his father, who, he knew, would never come back to her.

He stopped a little while at the grave of his dead mother, Seloe, and then bounded, with his heavy heart, down the oft-trodden path which led to his home.

But the home was not there!

Charred ruins and desolation greeted him.

His amazed and bewildered eyes saw only the smoking ends of logs which once had formed parts of that humble abode. For a moment he stood aghast, dazed and stupefied. The horror of it seemed to have turned him to stone. His soul sank within him. Then into his bewildered mind came thoughts of Selma, and he ran to the smoking ruins and searched eagerly for her. But there was not a living thing anywhere to greet him. He called, but there was no answer. It seemed as if his brave heart would break with the overwhelming weight of misfortune. Father, mother, home—all gone in a night! Alone in this great world of chaos and brutality where men hunted their fellows like beasts of the wild and showed them less pity. His spirit was crushed. His very soul seemed to have left his pathetic body, and he sat there a forlorn, heart-broken

waif amid the blackened cinders of his home. There was not a soul to comfort him, not a friend to tell him what it all meant—this desolate, this speechless, this inexpressibly wicked tragedy which was passing before his eyes. There he sat on one of the half-burned beams of his home with his face in his hands, crushed, weeping, empty-hearted.

But he stayed his tears when he remembered Selma. What had become of her? There was tragedy in the very uncertainty. Again he searched among the ashes for some tidings of her, but searched in vain. Then he ran to the nearest neighbors, as he had done once before when Seloe lay dead in her bed. But the neighbors knew as little as he.

The news of the disaster to the Stybright home spread like wildfire over the mountains, and the sympathetic highlanders came down from the hills and up from the valleys and in dumb curiosity hung about the ruins. They raked the embers and tossed the smouldering ends of logs aside. But all they discovered was a few bleached and crumbling bones. Whether they belonged to a human being or to the few smoked hams which once hung from the rafters no one could tell. They found no trace of Selma; and they never did. She had vanished from the knowledge of the living as completely as if carried to heaven in a whirlwind of fire. And amid the mysteries of the great war there was none more talked about

than the unknown yet deeply feared fate of Selma Stybright.

Gyp slipped away from the sympathetic neighbors and went up to the cliff overhead and there threw himself on the grave of Seloe. If she with her warm and tender mother-love could only speak to his crushed heart! If he could only go out with her again to the little playground among the pines and rhododendrons!

"Maw, won't yer speak t' me?" he sobbed, as his tears fell on her unresponsive grave. "I ain't got nobody t' love me now! I found paw dead on th' road 'ith his whiskers all bloody. An' our home's burned all up, an' nobody knows nothin' about my other maw. You was allus good t' me. Won't yer speak t' me, maw? I don't know where t' go nor what to do."

But there was neither voice nor cry nor any that regarded.

The lips of the dead were mute and the grave had no message. Crushed with his burdens, worn out with grief and travel, hungry and sore at heart, he fell asleep on the grave of his mother, where God gave him a few moments of sweet oblivion.

CHAPTER XV

THE OLD WELL-SWEEP

"WHAT you wimmin doin' here, perched about these ashes?"

The shrill voice was that of Snags Groucher as she suddenly appeared in the midst of a group of women at the ruins of the Stybright home. They were at first startled, then their astonishment turned to hate and revenge.

"Snags Groucher, w'at's th' meanin' o' this?" leaped from the lips of Judy Gans.

"It don't concern you'ns what I know," was the impudent reply.

"Well weuns think it do, an' we be a goin' to find out," and Judy's nose gave a few characteristic twitches.

"When ye do ye can notify me at me offs!" sneered the Groucher woman with a disdainful curl of the lip.

"Y' know me, Snags Groucher?" and Judy's eyes flashed fire.

"Yes I know yer. I'd re-cog-nize the wink o' that nose in Halifax. I know yer, Judy Gans, an' it hain't added much to me fund o' knowledge," and she gave a defiant toss of the head.

"Were you here last night, or were you not?"

Judy asked calmly in spite of the terrible provocation, as she pointed to the smouldering embers.

"An' if I was, that's my c'nsarn; an' if I wasn't it's none o' yourn."

"You had something to do with the burnin' o' this home last night, an' the murder o' Stybright an' the Jennings boys. Now clear yourself or take what's comin' t' ye."

"I thank ye very much fer yer good opinion of me. You'ns be very kind," with a most tantalizing and offensive bow.

"You're our prisoner. Take hold of her, women."

Snags had not observed that the women in their eagerness to hear what was said had completely surrounded her, and at the command of Judy Gans immediately closed in on her, taking hold of her arms and waist and hair and feet. Snags fought like a tigress till her hands were bound and her feet tied.

"Tie her up to a tree," said Mrs. Dawson, a tall angular woman with an assertive jaw and an eye that was not good to look into. "Tie her up. We'll force her to confess."

"Git a pair o' pincers an' pull out a few of her hairs," insisted Sade McQueen; "that won't be half as bad as burnin' wimmin in their own homes."

"Do you know me now, Snags Groucher?" Judy's face was livid with her exertion. Her

hair was disheveled and hung about her face like dead grass over a brook's edge.

"You're next, Judy Gans. You'r time's a comin! Jes wait!" Snags retorted, her small eyes flashing a hate that was positively satanic.

"Don't yer threaten. Yer in our hands now. Will ye answer: Had ye or had ye not anything t' do with th' burnin' o' th' house an' th' killin' o' Stybright?"

"None o' yer business! Did yer have anything to do with the burnin' o' my home last night an' th' hangin' o' Terbaccy Tom?"

"Is he hung?"

"Yes, stretched to a lim' o' th' twin oaks."

"Then we'll sing th' doxology; if th' preacher was only here t' lift th' chune." But Sade McQueen's suggestion was not seconded. Judy Gans was too serious.

"We had nothing to do with burnin' yer home or the hangin' o' Tom. An' we didn't even know he was hung, though we knew he orter been long ago. But we'll settle one thing at a time. Be ye goin' t' answer my question?"

"Make her answer, Judy," demanded Mrs. Dawson.

"Git it out of her," insisted Sade McQueen.

"Answer, or be hanged," called Jen Coney, from the outer circle of the crowd.

"Snags, weuns is not goin' to dawdle no furdher. Y' jes' gotter answer and no more lyin' or foolin'."

"I'll see th' whole bunch o' ye hanged afore I gin ye any satisfaction."

"T' the crick with her. Maybe a bath'll be good fer her temper." The suggestion was from Sade McQueen.

"T' the crick! T' the crick with her!" shouted a half dozen voices at once, and away to the creek they started with their obstinate and resisting prisoner.

On the bank of the stream Stybright had rigged up a well-sweep for the purpose of securing water from the center of the creek. The sweep was set on a pivot a few feet from the ground in such way that the heavy end of the pole overbalanced the long end which reached over the water. When the pail was full it was an easy matter to swing the sweep on its pivot, lift the pail from its fastening and empty it. To this crude invention the women came half-dragging, half-carrying their infuriate and blaspheming prisoner.

"Stop yer swearin', Snags, or ye'll git an extry dip fer that," called the Coney woman.

"Will ye tell now, afore we rig ye up t' th' sweep? It's yer last chance."

"Find out what yer want to find, ye bawlin' heathen," and the answer was followed with a string of oaths which made the cheeks of the women blanch.

"Fasten her on, wimmin! Sade, you and Jen Coney do th' tyin, an' do it t' stick." Judy had

now passed the compromise line. There was to be no more trifling. Into the water Snags must go.

"O we'll tie her good an' proper. We've been to th' horse shed an' have th' ropes."

It was no holiday task to tie the desperate woman as she writhed and kicked, and cursed all the women in that hill country and the old flag and everybody that believed in it. But in spite of all her screaming and vituperation she was securely bound to the beam, like a martyr to the stake. Three or four women threw themselves on the heavy end of the sweep and swung it around slowly over the water. Judy Gans left her place to see how things were progressing; but no sooner had she removed her weight from the end of the sweep than the rest of the women let go, and the end of the sweep dropped with a tremendous splash into the water and Snags dipped down and out of sight.

"Swing 'er out, wimmen', she's had enough!" shouted Judy, winking her nose like a rabbit.

And the terrified woman, her clothing soaked through, was pushed ashore, sputtering like a porpoise, the water streaming from hair and hands and clothing.

"Now mebbly ye'll confess, Snags Groucher."

"I'll n-n-never c-c-cunfess t-t-t' nuthin'."

"Drown her; drown her, Judy. Soak th' she traitor."

"D'ye hear what they say, Snags. They'll put

ye under an' keep ye there if ye don't tell them th' truth about last night. If ye want to live confess; ef ye don't confess, in ye go."

"Put me in ef ye want to; put me under an' keep me there; but I'll n-n-never g-g-go back on my crowd."

"In with her ag'in, wimmin. Keep her in a bit longer this time."

"Cool her off. Soak the perfanity out'n her."

"She's earned more'n she's gittin'. In with her."

"She might as well end her days at the end o' a well-sweep as at th' end of a rope or th' lim' of a tree," snapped Sade McQueen.

"Weuns don't wanten kill anybody jes' yet. Keep th' sweep a movin' there, wimmin. A little more weight on th' butt end, please."

"She be a right smart bit heavier than when we dumped her in th' tother time," chirped Jen Coney, as the pitiful Snags dropped into the water the second time.

"Now swinger out ag'in," directed Judy.

The women bunched themselves on the end of the sweep; but her clothes being saturated, the weight was too heavy for them to overcome. They tried and tried again.

"We can't raise her!" the women shouted to Judy Gans.

"Some more o' ye throw yerselves onto the beam, there, and be quick afore the cussed woman drownds."

They rushed to the heavy end of the sweep and threw all their weight upon it, but the water-logged burden at the farther end was too much for them.

"Come here th' rest o' ye. Put yer shoulders against the beam there an' push with all yer might. Bear down there, ye wimmin, down on the butt end. Push, everybody!"

With hard pushing, some of the women in the water to their knees, they managed to shove the sweep with its limp and flabby burden ashore. The last spark of life seemed to have fled. The women were frightened. They did not really want to drown the poor creature. They were all excited, suggesting a dozen things at once. They tore off the ropes with which she was bound and released the miserable creature. They lifted the sweep from the pivot and threw it on the ground, placed the limp and gasping woman over it, face down, and tried to force the water out of her lungs.

"Open her collar," shouted one.

"Turn her on her side," suggested another.

"Give her a pinch of liquor," called a third.

"Try her with a bit o' snuff," yelled Mother Mixy.

"Throw some water in her face," gurgled Jen Coney.

"B'gosh, she's had enough o' water fer a spell," giggled Sade McQueen.

"Rub her laigs," pleaded Mrs. Dawson.

Some called one thing and some another, meanwhile Judy Gans kept winking her nose and keeping up artificial respiration until the sorely tortured woman began to show signs of life. As soon as she was able to speak, Judy Gans assumed her former rôle, pretending that this strangulation was just what was intended.

"Now maybe ye'll tell. Who burned this house?"

"D-d-dunno."

"What'd ye do with Guy?"

"Nawthin'."

"She's lyin' ag'in," shouted Sade. "Hang her this time."

"Wa'n't Guy an' Selma t' home w'en ye burned th' house?"

"Naw."

"Aw, she burned it. She burned it!"

"Ye lie, Sade McQueen."

Sade bounded toward the furious woman but was intercepted.

"She just said Guy and Selma wasn't there when the house was burned," Sade declared vehemently. "How'd she know they wasn't there if she was not there herself? If she knows they wasn't there then she was there and she oughter be hung."

"Did yer see Selma last night?"

"I told ye I didn't. Hush yer fool questions."

"Did yer see Gyp las' night?"

"Didn't see the brat."

"She's lyin' ag'in. He didn't wauken ye up an' ast ye t' cum t' help 'im with th' dead men under th' oak trees, did he?" sneered Sade. "Ye didn't tell 'im ye'd kill 'im if he didn't go home, did ye," she taunted.

"I tell ye I didn't see that polecat last night."

"An ye didn't tell 'im ye'd set th' dogs on 'im, did ye?"

"If I'd a wanted t' set the dogs on 'im I'd a done it."

Further inquiry was interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Perk Thompson and Sykes Snickerby, who had taken a notion to run down and see the ruins.

"What-why-who's this ye got here; not Snags Groucher?" Perk sputtered.

"Hevings be praised!" ejaculated Sykes. "That's what I call a speshul providence."

"Heep providence has to do with sich as you be!" snapped Snags, as she glared defiantly in his face.

"Ye got away from us last night, but ye'er at the end o' yer string now. We have ceased to have any pity fer murderers."

"Murderers! An' who hung poor Tom?"

"I helped to, and we did it because he was a murderer and had forfeited his life."

"We intend to clean this neighborhood of all home-burners and murderers. Hereafter there will be no quarter. They are to be shot or hung whenever found. War knows no respect of per-

sons," was the pitiless conclusion announced by Perk Thompson.

"What ye been a doin' with th' wench?" Sykes asked of Judy.

"Duck'd her in th' crick t' make her c'nfess."

"Did she own to helpin' to kill Guy an' th' Jennings boys?"

"She won't own t' nawthin."

"We'll jes' keep a grip on Snags until a few things is settled."

"Where's Gyp?" Perk inquired.

"Up to Seloe's burryin' place."

"Take her up there and let Gyp answer whether she saw him last night."

"Don't untie her hands. She'll scratch yer eyes out."

"Come along, Snags."

Perk took one arm and Sykes the other and led her up the path to the spot where Gyp was sleeping.

"It's a God's mercy that's on him," said Judy to Mrs. Dawson, as they saw the boy lying so peacefully on the grave, unconscious of all the horror that was going on about him. They did not like to awaken him, and stood at a distance, like Hagar in the wilderness. But as soon as the men came up with their captive, Thompson said:

"Wake up, Gyp." The boy sprang instantly to his feet and stood for a moment as one dazed. The presence of so many people at first fright-

ened him, until he realized that they were his friends, and that Snags was a prisoner.

"Gyp, do you know this woman?"

"That's Snags."

"Where did you see her last?"

"At th' winder away over yander where my paw was killed."

"She says she did not see you last night?"

"If she didn't see me it was kase I was in th' shadder of th' house. I seed her, an' she heerd me, an' talked t' me."

"What did she say to you?"

"She ast me who I was, an' I tol' her; and she said fer me t' get out o' that or ther'd be another dead man under th' oaks."

"How'd she know there was any dead men under the trees?"

"She'll have ter answer."

"What else did she say to you when you were asking for mercy and help at the dead hour of night?"

"She said if I didn't get outa that she'd sic th' dogs on me, an' she dropped th' winder as if she was agoin' t' do it."

"That's enough. Come along, Snags. We know all about yer villainies: how ye burned Hank Hummel's home, and planned t' capture Conway afore he got away from the Stybright home. But ye failed. He got away too soon for ye."

"Yes," said Gyp, interrupting, "I seed her a lookin' through our winder."

"They tried to get you, too, Gyp. But you left with Conway one day afore they came; but they burnt yer house an' killed yer paw. They hung the Jennings boys who happened t' be in your house that evening when they came. But Terbaccy Tom'll hang no more men, an' Snags'll burn no more cabins. An' there's Jim Habor and Kernal Maxwell an' a few others'll find out afore long which is th' toughest—ther necks or the lim' of a tree. Come along."

CHAPTER XVI

A FIRE IN EDEN

HIDDEN among the trees in one of the fairest portions of the Rondolet Valley was the hospitable home of Col. Richard Maxwell. It was a quiet, restful place, such as the weary long for at the worn end of life. The fine old mansion was overshadowed by towering pines and mimosa trees, and the spacious grounds were pillared with primeval oaks and mulberries. Roses bloomed along graveled walks, and the greensward smiled in the pleasant riot of blue and white violets. Honeysuckles burdened the fences and aspiring ivy climbed the great columnar oaks and swung in airy festoons from lofty branches, or, hammock-like, joined bough to bough in sylvan reciprocity.

About this luxurious manor-house the mountains stood eternal. They were wooded to the summit, except where the toiling mountaineers had cleared the timber and reared their lowly habitations. Along the rugged slopes there were patches of red earth denuded of all forest glory, on which the mountain people had planted their vines and orchards of peach and apple, or fields of corn and cotton, and where the hardy sons of

toil forced from the sun-kissed earth a poor but honest livelihood.

Col. Maxwell sat on his pleasant piazza gazing dreamily over his pipe into tranquil sublimity and emptiness. His gaze was toward the sunset, as if he were bidding that great placque of gold a friendly good-evening. Already the green helmets of the mountains were edged in crimson. The clouds over distant Thunder Cliff had melted into dissolving islands of fire. The whole horizon was softened into orange and mist. A lone sentinel star came out and stood over the mountain of Melrose, a beacon on the coast of a better country.

And still Col. Maxwell sat hugging his pipe and his idle fancy. The night closed in, and, like a horrid specter, there passed before his vision the memory of the night before and the bloody work in which he had been engaged.

"O God!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet, "that a scene of such tranquillity should be marred by such a memory!"

Then he paced restlessly back and forth along the piazza, grinding his teeth against the pipe-stem, and emitting puffs of smoke which told of the deep intensity of his feeling.

"What insidious disturbers of the peace these memories of ours are! Here I am, owner of all this magnificent landscape, all this beauty, this evening fragrance, this harmony of heaven and earth at their best; and to sit here in the glory

of it all and have my reveries broken by the intrusion of such damnable deeds which memory keeps flaunting before my vision! That Stybright! and those Jennings curs! Served them right. Why should I have compunctions of conscience? Bah! This is war. And all's fair in war. There's nothing more to be said. Casuistry has here no right of eminent domain."

He sat down in his luxurious armchair and threw his feet over the railing.

He was a loyal southerner with scores of slaves and smiling acres. He loved the South. He believed in the war. He hated every man who hated the historic institution of human slavery. War was war, and war was here, and foes must be crushed wherever found. He had no apologies and no regrets. These men, he mused in his soliloquy of self-justification, had forfeited their lives. They did their work and they got their wages.

The night settled around him as he was thus complaisantly justifying his part in the previous night's tragedy. A dark shadow passed under the mimosa on the right of the piazza. Thinking it was one of his slaves he gave no heed to it. He struck a match and held the blazing splinter to his pipe. It was fatal. In the puff of light his face was outlined. Scarcely had he tossed the match over the balustrade when two Winchesters were leveled upon him and Perk Thompson demanded:

"Hands up!"

"What's the meaning—!" the sentence was not completed. A gun was thrust almost into his mouth and a trigger clicked. His hands went up just as Thompson pushed the gun aside, and the ball that would have blown his head from his shoulders was wasted in the air.

"Come along, Kernal, 'with what measure ye mete it shall be measured t' you.'"

"You don't mean to tell me that—"

"We ben't talkin', Kernal, we be a doin' things, as you was last night."

"For God's sake—"

"Hush yer perfanity. Why didn't ye call on Gawd last night when ye was throwin' th' rope over the oak lim' fer Stybright and the Jennings boys? Ef ye be such a friend o' Gawd's he'll give yer a chance t' explain a few things afore long an' ef he don't, we will."

A score of men by this time had filled the lawn with their shouting: "Remember Guy Stybright!" "Stybright and the Jenningses!" "Remember the twin oaks and what we found there!" "Don't fergit it, Kernal!"

"Into the house, boys;" shouted Sykes Snickerby, "as he had no respect fer home, nuther will we."

Into the wide halls they dashed, spreading like a flood from right to left, while the members of the household fled as from a pestilence. Maxwell was flung into a dark closet under the stairs and

the door locked upon him. Two of their number stood guard, while the others searched the house for other Confederates. Finding none, Mark Dawson turned to Sykes and said:

"Nothin' doin' here; where's the wine?"

"The wine cellar! The wine cellar!" shouted Sam Sharp, "follow me!"

Soon there was a popping of corks and a sparkle of glasses and the crowd made themselves hilarious. Col. Maxwell was forgotten, save by the guards, who watched the conviviality with distrust. There was uproarious merriment over the easy capture of the Colonel, and Mark Dawson and Sam Sharp joined in a clog dance for the amusement of the others. In the midst of their merriment the burly voice of Perk Thompson called from the hall:

"Men, let's get to business!"

"Yes," roared Sykes Snickerby, "let's get this job off'n our hands."

"Now fer serious business," Dawson responded. "Hurry up, Perk."

"Men, bring out the Kernal," Thompson commanded.

The lock was thrown back and the door of the closet pulled open and two guns were leveled through the dark entrance.

"Come out, Kernal, or die where you be."

But the Colonel did not respond.

"Come out, Kernal, d'ye hear?"

Still no response.

"Don't shoot, yet, boys," directed Thompson. "We mustn't be balked o' the hangin'—gotta hev some fun out o' this."

"Let him test one of his own oak limbs," suggested Sam Sharp.

"Yes, he seems to be rayther fond o' oaks and hemp," drawled Dawson.

"Kernal," shouted Thompson, "we give yer jes' three minutes to come out."

The guns were still drawn to the shoulders of the guards, ready as soon as Thompson gave the command.

"One minit's gone, Kernal."

"Two minit's gone."

"Guns ready, boys."

"One, two, three, fire!"

The guns belched their terrible charges into the dark closet. The detonation was something terrific. The whole house thundered with the explosion. Nothing could be seen save a wreath of smoke that curled up from the entrance. There was not a sound to be heard under the stairway.

"Guess ye've did yer work purty good, fellers; don't even hear him kickin' in thar."

A candle was fastened on the end of a bayonet and thrust into the closet.

Horrors! The place was empty!

With wild eyes and chagrined, desperate faces the baffled men pressed into the doorway and gazed into the dimly lighted recess, only to dis-

cover a trap-door by which their captive had dropped into the cellar.

"S'round th' house an' th' slave quawtahs!" shouted Thompson at the top of his voice.

"Shoot any man down who attempts to break through th' lines," added Snickerby.

"Fire th' house!" called Thompson in stentorian tones. "If he's in it, let him come out; if he stays in let him roast!"

"All I want is another chance," swore Mark Dawson, regretting that he had not been more successful on his first attempt on the piazza.

"Matches! matches!"

"Away with your matches. Fling th' candles into the beds!"

"Bust his ile lamps on the floors."

"Let him feel how it goes to have yer home burned over yer head."

The flames were soon bursting through the doors and windows, and the old trees and the night were lit with weird and awful glory and with the wickedness of man. The ivy on the tops of the mimosa trees hissed and swayed in the heat, the green leaves crackled, bent up and dropped in little spits of fire into the grass. The whole scene seemed to ache with retribution. The blaze of that splendid old manor-house, with all its treasures of art, was lit by the tinder carried over from the Stybright cabin!

"Wonder how th' Kernal likes t' play a losin' hand at his own game?" Dawson contemptuously sneered, as he stood in view of the cellar door in

the hope that the smoke and flame would cause Maxwell to try escaping that way.

"Th' Kernal's gotter stan' by his own logic."

"Y' heard what he said: 'War is war?'"

"An' that Stybright had done his work an' got his wages. Well's he's gittin' his, all right."

"If any of you fellers see him," Perk called, "shoot him on the spot."

"Ther'll be no arrest this time," muttered Dawson, nursing his chagrin.

Following the instructions of Thompson the roads were picketed, also the outbuildings and the slave quarters. The mortification over losing their prisoner when they had him so successfully entrapped caused them now to forget everything except his recapture, dead or alive. In their frenzy they searched the slave cabins, examined every building and the shadow of every tree and shrub. By the light of the burning dwelling they did their work effectually; but nowhere was Colonel Maxwell found. He had either, as they supposed, escaped to the mountains before his absence was discovered, or else was buried under the smouldering ruins of his home.

Meanwhile Aunt Dinah lay in her cabin simulating sleep, but a vision passed before her eyes of her "Ole Massa" plunging through the lawn and into her cabin, and out through the rear door to the mountains, and she held her fat sides and chuckled:

"Lawdy, how dem white trash am fooled."

CHAPTER XVII

AS ONE WHOM HIS MOTHER COMFORTETH

GYP STYBRIGHT had no part in the proceedings at the Maxwell manor or in the summary execution of others who were engaged in the murder of his father. Gyp was old far beyond his years; old in courage, in strategy and in that ready grasp of things which amounted almost to genius. But now he had no heart for these inhumanities which were shown by friend and foe alike. His spirit was so crushed that it was absolutely alone. It seemed out of touch with all things about him. He cared only for rest, or for the sweet sympathy of one who had felt the bitterness of grief and found the way of consolation. He felt that an awful wrong had been done him; but the feeling in his heart was not one of retaliation but of utter emptiness and desolation.

He could think of but one friend whom he really longed to see, and that was the sweet, far-away maiden, the dip of whose vanishing oars yet sounded in his ears. For a few days he remained with those who had prepared the body of his father for the last untroubled sleep. But more and more his heart yearned for the gentle

Aida far over the cruel mountains. He knew not what to do, and he knew not how she could help him, but he wanted sympathy. He wanted love. He wanted his mother back from the grave on the green terrace above the ashes of his home. He wanted his father; but he, too, lay speechless in the uncompassionate earth. And now he wanted Aida. She only was left. He felt that if he were only with her his heart would not be so empty. The world was so big and he was so small. The mountains were so great and majestic, but in all their mighty strength there was no help for him. So many homes, and his own in ashes. So many people, and now all of them strangers. Sympathetic they might be, loving too, as the love of the great world goes, but when the heart's dearest kindred are in the earth, all unresponsive to prayers and tears alike, how very, very cold the once glowing world appears! Whither could the poor boy turn?

In all this empty waste there seemed but one bright spot to the orphan boy. Had he known of the consolations of the gospel he might have looked up, but now his dreams were beyond the mountains. Quietly he slipped away into the great forests with his grief as his only companion, his sense of misfortune sometimes rocked into slumber by the jeweled hand of hope. Over mountain paths he toiled, his one burden the sorrow that he bore. The birds seemed to hush their song as he came near, and the dark pines

hung their boughs low as if in neighborly compassion. There was a hush in the cascades whose waters were wont to tinkle rhythmically, like the bells on the robe of the Jewish high priest. They slipped soothingly as if to lull the grief of their fellow pilgrim. Gyp thought he had never seen such a quiet world. He saw a great eagle spread its wings and sail far out, high above the crystal thread of a stream that wound through a deep and narrow valley, and he longed for such pinions that he might fly away somewhere and be at rest. But whither?

Aida and her friends heard with deep and tender sorrow the sad story which he brought.

"You are welcome to our camp, my poor boy," said Mr. Moncure kindly. "We will take care of you."

"Thank you, sir. Where's Conway, the Union soldier I brung you?"

Gyp felt better acquainted with him than anyone else, and he wanted to tell him what had befallen the home which had once entertained him.

"He has gone, Gyp. He and Hampton have taken their chances of getting through to the Northern army."

It was another hope crushed. Aida was now the only one with whom he could talk freely, and she listened with tenderness and pity as he rehearsed the tragic story of the few days since they had parted. Her cheeks were white and scarlet by turns. Indignation and compassion swept her

heart as one wave follows another. And when the men turned away to their duties she went over and sat beside him on the bench by the door.

"I know how you feel," she said to him. "My mother lies far away under the green grass in the garden at home, and my little brother's grave is by her side. There is no one there now to water the flowers or train the myrtle where they lie. My old home, too, is gone. At least I suppose it is burned long ago, and I can sympathize with you."

He raised his tear-dimmed eyes to hers. In all his life he had never seen such a look of beautiful tenderness, such sweet and trustful compassion. If angels ever look through the eyes of mortals he was sure they were looking upon him then. He gave a little sob, but could not trust himself to speak.

"Do you remember," she said, trying to cheer him, "how brave you were that night when you piloted Mr. Conway all alone over the dark mountains?"

"Y-e-s," he replied hesitatingly between his sobs.

"And don't you remember that other night when there was not a star in the sky, when you pressed my hand and left me on the dark river, and with no companion started back home on your perilous journey? How heroic you were then. Don't you remember it?"

"That was the night they killed my paw."

"And do you recall how fearlessly you ran through those dangerous forests to find someone to help with the dead men, before you knew that your father was among them, or whether the dead men were friends or foes?"

"If I'd a know'd it was my paw, I'd a never left 'im."

"But in the kindness of your heart for others in misfortune you forgot all about yourself. Now, when everything is so dark you will try again to be brave, won't you?"

"Aida, this is diff'nt. My heart's broke. But if you'll help me I'll be as brave as I can."

"I'll help you all in my power, Gyp. But you know a young girl like me cannot do much in these awful war times when men are so wicked."

"Won't they ever be good, like my maw was?"

"I only know of one place where men never cease to be good."

"Tell me, Aida. Oh, tell me."

"In heaven."

"That's where my maw is."

"And mine, too. It's where our preacher said all the good go when they die."

"My paw didn't use t' be good; but he quit bein' bad, an' I know he must be in heaven, too."

"If he is, Gyp, you don't need to cry."

"I wisht he was here. Paw was so big an' strong."

"God'll comfort you, Gyp."

"I wisht he would."

"He has sent you to us, and papa and I will help you all we can."

"Did he send me t' you, Aida?"

"I think so. He does all things that are good."

"Well I'm sure he did good that time; I couldn't a found anybody what would a been as nice t' me as you be."

"And then papa told you that you could stay right here, and make your home with us. Now wasn't God good to you?"

"How did God send me here? I thought I come all alone, an' nobody ever tol' me t' come. I jes come myself."

"But he knew that you were in trouble, and he put it in your heart to come. That's the way he does."

"How'd ye find it all out, Aida. I never know'd such things."

"My mamma used to tell me about how God would take care of me when she went away to heaven. And he has. And the preacher used to tell the congregation how he watched over a great nation one time and led them by a pillar of fire to a beautiful country."

"I don't want no pillar o' fire under my head. It'd burn all my hair off."

"It wasn't a pillow, it was a pillar of fire, a sort of beacon that went before the horses and carriages and soldiers. But he guides us all some way. He won't leave one of us. Don't you know

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that the little birds can't fall down unless he lets them."

"Well, Aida, if he looks after the woodpeckers and the yallerhammers don't you think he'll look atter me?"

"He surely will. Just stay here and trust him."

"Him an' you."

"Yes, we will both be your friends, so don't cry any more. Listen! Did you hear that?"

"What was it?"

"Sounds like a woman's voice."

"It be, an' they be runnin' an' a comin 'this way."

"What can it be?"

"Oh, Aida, it's Snags. It's Snags, an' she's got out."

"Out of where? Who is she?"

"Snags Groucher. I know her. She helpt t' kill my paw!"

At that moment the furious woman dashed past them, never looking around. Down toward the river she ran, her hair streaming on the winds.

"Oh, Gyp, the boat! the boat!"

He understood, and the two leaped from their places and ran in pursuit to overtake her if possible before she gained the boat. They reached the river just as she was bending over the skiff in her efforts to push it out into the stream. Gyp was running so furiously that he was un-

able to check himself and ran into her with such force that she was knocked headforemost over the boat into the river. She dived like a muskrat and disappeared coming again to the surface half way across the stream, and was soon swimming under the overhanging branches on the opposite shore.

No sooner had she disappeared in the woods than Sam Sharp, Perk Thompson and Mark Dawson reached the river and leaped into the boat and shoved out in hot pursuit.

"How did it happen, Snickerby?" Mr. Moncure inquired later in the day.

"Ye know th' confounded creeter war confined in that ar cabin what we use fer a prison. An' th' darn grounhawg climbed up th' chimbly an' got on th' roof an' swung out on a lim' an' jumped t' th' ground an' run fer th' water like a hawg o' Gadara."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STYBRIGHT SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

THESE mountain vigils gave to Gyp and Aida a common purpose, and they entered with zest into any exploit that threw them into each other's company. Gyp was characterized by rugged honesty and innocence and, withal, a quaint originality, an artlessness and a genuine manliness which attracted Aida from the first time they met; and there was in her the sweetness and cultivated grace, the charm of manner and the gift of conversation which made her the admiration of the whole camp. This won the love not only of the orphan boy, but of everyone who knew her. To him, however, she seemed a most wonderful creature, the most beautiful and fascinating he had ever looked upon. During these days they were much together, and the days seemed more charming because of it.

As they rambled through the woods or over the great heights or stood alone on some promontory looking away over wondrous landscapes of quiet valley and winding stream, dull, slanting roads and the green webs of outlying mead-

ows, patches of orchards, homesteads and diminutive mountains—looking as Moses the servant of God looked from his blue Pisgah over the land of promise—they were building temples more enduring than ever stood on Mount Zion or the Acropolis. Neither of them in these blissful, self-centered days thought much, if indeed, at all, of what the future held for them. The tonic of the mountain breezes brought the roses to their cheeks and gave them all the vigor, elasticity and abounding hopefulness of youth. Invisible hands were toiling at the inner temples, and “there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard while they were building.” Nature was silently shaping her ideals.

Gyp’s ready hands constructed a rustic bench in one of their sylvan retreats, and to this delightful resort they often came, spending long hours in happy fellowship, making odd devices out of moss or bark or wild flowers. Not far away there were cool rocks where ferns abounded and a thread-like stream unraveled itself from some hidden spool and became tangled among grasses, and mosses and jeweled the maidenhair ferns by its side. Here birds rocked themselves to sleep in the depths of pleasant trees or, cradled in their cup-like nests, sang their lullabys to their dreaming young.

“Aida,” Gyp inquired as they sat one day in their cozy bower, “Hev ye ever been t’ th’ schools where they hev books an’ larn things?”

"Yes, Gyp, I've been to school nearly all my life until we were driven from home by this cruel war."

"Well I wisht I c'd go, so's I'd know things an' c'd use langwidge like you."

"Gyp, you do know a great many things. Why I just envy you your knowledge of trees and brooks and birds and all sorts of creeping things. You can find your way out of any part of the mountains like a bee."

"But, Aida, bugs an' things can't make me talk fine an' han'le langwidge. A bug's a bug, but langwidge is dif'nt."

"You have learned from observation, and I have only learned from books, so you are even with me."

"Some way I can't see through things. I see things an' they be away beyent me, an' I don't know th' meanin' of 'em, an' I can't think 'em out. It's like gettin' lost in th' woods an' ye can't find th' way back."

"And who is there that does not get lost when he tries to think out the things around him? Why, Gyp, I just don't know anything at all. I havn't begun to learn yet."

"But you see things an' say things so nice; but when I tries to think 'em out my mind gets all snarled up like a ball o' yarn an' I don't know how t' untangle it. It be jus' like a big cloud what don't know whar it's gwine to, an' jus' swirls aroun' an' aroun' an' gets blacker and

blacker all th' time, an' then begins t' thunder an' lighten."

"We all learn as we grow older and our mind becomes clearer. When the war is over maybe you can go to school."

"Oh, but I'd like to get eddycation so's I c'd keep things cleared up in my mind, jus' as maw uster clear th' coffee by puttin' eggs in it."

"And that's just what I want to do by and by, go to school and get wise and know things and be able to talk like my dear old teacher."

"But ye beenter school, Aida, an' ye air wise an' has bu'ful langwidge. I wisht I know'd all ye know an' c'd say things so powerful nice."

"Now, Gyp, I'll tell you what let's do: I'll teach you what I know as well as I can, and you teach me what you know about insects and birds and wild game and the highways and byways of the rabbits and squirrels and the striped chipmunks and gophers. Is it a bargain?"

"Oh, that'll be powerful nice," then after a pause: "but I don't know much about them critters."

"And I don't know much about school teaching, so we are even. But we'll have a school."

"Where'll we hev it?"

"Right here, and right away."

"How'll we start it."

"You'll be Professor of Natural History, and I'll be Instructor in Any-Thing-You-Like—rhetoric, grammar or orthography."

"I don't know nuthin' about them things. Never seed any of 'em on these mountings."

"But I'm going to teach you. You'll be my pupil and I'll be yours, and we'll just have the funniest school you ever heard of."

"When's school t' begin?"

"Right now. Ring the bell."

"Ha'n't got none."

"Well, hunt around and get something. You're the teacher, remember."

"There ha'n't nothin' here that'll ring, Aida."

"I'll tell you: take this stick and hit that rock over there three times."

"What fer?"

"To call books."

"But books won't come fer callin'."

"No they won't; but that's to be our bell, and when it rings school will begin."

Slash! slash! slash! and the rock resounded with the thump of Gyp's stick until the little stream quivered and wondered what was doing among the young people.

"Now," Aida proceeded to say, "you are to call the school to order. Rap with your knuckles on this bench and then I'll sit down and wait for you to call the class in Natural History."

Gyp rapped according to directions, and Aida hung her bonnet on the branch of a tulip tree and took her seat.

"Now say: 'Class in Natural History will take its place' No, wait! This is going to be a

religious school, and you'll have to conduct chapel exercises."

"What's them?"

"Why chapel exercises mean that you've got to open this school with prayer."

"I didn't know that a school was like a can o' jam what had t' be opened afore y' got at th' goodies."

"Well it has, Professor Gyp Stybright, and you'd better just hurry up and pray or there won't be any school."

Gyp got down on his knees and laying his hands and head on Aida's lap, as he used to do on his mother's knee, said:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

"School's open," said Gyp, rising to his feet. "W'at I gotter do next?"

"The insect class is now going to be heard. Mr. Prof. Stybright, here is a bug which flew into my lap while you were conducting chapel exercises. What is the name of this little creature, please?"

"Bug?" he responded interrogatively, looking down into her hands which she held together, edge to edge, forming a dainty little bowl in which the creature was vainly seeking some avenue to liberty. "Lemmy see: That air is w'at I be callin' a snappin' bug."

"A what?"

"A snappin' bug."

"Why do you call it that?"

"Lemmy show yer." He took the wriggling thing between his thumb and forefinger. "Watch 'im. See him snap? See that?"

The insect raised its head and brought it down with a quick jerk making a clicking sound each time. This it repeated as rapidly as its bugship could go through the motions.

"That's w'y we be callin' 'im a snappin' bug."

"Where does it live, and what does it do for a living?"

"Lives under th' bark of ole rotten logs an' about stumps an' under fence corners. He's a harmless critter; won't bite or kick or git into yer hair. Does nothin' fer a livin' but jes' snap."

"He gets the snap on people, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he do."

"Well, I think that's school enough for one day. It's time for intermission, anyway."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RED SWAN'S NECK

So passed the weeks and months, and one eventful day Gyp and Aida were together happy in their woodland retreat. They were now one and inseparable. So absorbed were they in each other's company that they did not notice a solitary horseman making his way along the distant valley. Only a field-glass could have told whether the far off rider were friend or foe. The horse was a light bay and cantered over the dusty road at a lively pace. From a mere speck in the distance the proportions and color were now clearly distinguishable. The rider swung around a curve in the road, crossed the bridge over a little stream, turned the shoulder of the hill and passed out of sight. He came again into view farther up the mountain side. Patiently yet perseveringly, he came, with eager glances about him, occasionally lifting his field-glass to his eyes and scanning the hills. For a little while he stood outlined like an equestrian statue on a distant summit, his glass to his eyes; then the forests shut him off from view. Yet perseveringly he followed the mountain road until he came near to the place where the young lovers sat delightfully

absorbed in their woodland retreat, oblivious of the approach of friend or foe.

The traveler paused as he heard their mirth and chatter, then quietly urged his horse a little nearer. Glancing through the foliage he recognized them as the children of his enemies, friends of the North and enemies of the stars and bars. He had seen Gyp before, and Aida, he was sure, was the daughter of Richard Moncure, one of the ring-leaders in this nest of "liers-out." He remembered the face of the girl as the one he had seen that day, long months ago, when he and Terbaccy Tom served the notice on her father the evening before he fled from his home.

The rider was Jim Habor, as cruel and relentless as ever. The blood still burned in his veins against the followers of the old flag, and when he discovered who these happy, unsuspecting young people were a wild and wicked thought took possession of him. He thought he saw a way by which this camp of mountaineers might be wholly suppressed. He would capture Aida and Gyp, carry them within the Confederate lines and hold them as hostages under threat of death until Moncure and his men would throw down their arms and take the oath of allegiance to the Confederate standard. The more he thought of it, the more his daring spirit rose to the occasion. He determined that, live or die, he would risk it.

But to capture them, single-handed, and make off with them was no easy matter. Besides he

knew not how near their friends might be; and a failure to capture either one of them might defeat the whole plot and bring an armed posse down upon him before he could make good his escape. But, he mused, what good is Gyp? He has no friends who would care where he was. His capture would accomplish nothing; but to take Aida and leave him, ah, there was the danger to his success. He would shoot Gyp and carry Aida away! No one would mourn the little rascal if he now leveled his gun and laid him to sleep among the leaves. Let the robins cover him as they did the babes in the wood. He has no friends who would throw down their arms to ransom him. Then let him rot. Ah, but the sound of a rifle! That would defeat him.

Unexpectedly to him the difficulty adjusted itself. As his malignant eyes peered like a wolf's through the foliage he saw Gyp lean over and whisper something to the beautiful girl by his side, and heard him say:

"Good-bye, Aida, I'm goin' t' th' lookout. I'll be back as soon as I see ther's no danger," and he took his gun and disappeared among the trees.

The road up which Habor had come winds up the face of the mountain like the graceful curve of a swan's neck. The red earth gives it the color of the fields themselves; and because of this peculiarity it is locally known as "The Red Swan's Neck." When the trees are denuded of

their leaves the suggestiveness of the comparison is most apparent. The cleared field at the edge of the woods and this bare, crooked highway, rising from one end of it, presents a most striking resemblance to a swan. It was around this tortuous grade that Habor had climbed to where this terrible opportunity now confronted him.

Aida, with a piece of needle-work in her hands, was all unconscious of her peril.

No sooner had Gyp disappeared than Habor straightened himself in his saddle, drew in his reins, and, with his open palm patted his faithful steed and spoke to her softly as a mother might croon to her babe. The fiery, impulsive creature seemed to understand the will of her master, and to be in accord with it.

"Do your duty, Nelly," he whispered, as he pressed his heels against her flanks. She stepped forward as softly as if the brown leaves were wool beneath her feet. The snapping of a twig caused Aida to look up. Habor dashed his spurs into the horse's sides and sprang at one bound to where she sat. Before the frightened girl realized what it all meant Habor bent from his saddle, caught her rudely by the arm and lifted her to his side. He then turned his horse and was soon out on the road, where he gave the animal full rein and she bounded away like an arrow from the bow.

"Help! Murder! Save me!" shrieked the terrified girl.

Habor laid his coarse, ungloved hand over her mouth and hissed in her ear:

"Hush! None of your nonsense! No harm will come to you if you be quiet. Be still, I tell you!" he demanded with an oath.

"Help! help! help!" she shrieked until the echoing hills sent back the cry.

Habor could not prevent her shrieks. He had but two hands, and one was needed to guide his furious steed and the other to hold this kidnapped and terrified girl in the saddle. The horse dashed down the road at a frightful pace while Aida sent her wild cry among the cliffs. Gyp heard the first cry of alarm, and glancing under the branches of the trees saw a fierce man in grey lift the struggling girl to his side and gallop away. He raised his rifle to shoot, but it was too late. Rider and steed in one momentary flash of color passed from his view. He was horrified, and heard nothing but the vanishing cry, growing fainter and fainter:

"H-e-l-p! h-e-l-p! h-e-l-p!"

The young rifleman's thoughts were as quick as the flight of the kidnapper. He saw the direction taken and, leaping toward the highway, prayed:

"Gawd help me, and I'll save her!"

He saw the horseman start down the sinuous way, which lay a great **S** on the mountain side. Across the first steep semi-circle he bounded as one leaping for life. He plunged down the slope,

crashing through underbrush, and like a wild chamois among its native rocks, leaping ten feet or more at a bound. Clearing rocks and fallen timbers at peril of instant death he came in sight of the road just in time to see the furious horseman dash out of sight. Aida, endeavoring to twist herself from her captor's hands threw her head backward and caught a momentary glimpse of Gyp as he stood with his rifle to his shoulder ready to fire. She thrust her white arm toward him and cried:

"Save me! Save me!"

He dared not shoot. She was in direct line and the ball to reach Habor must pass through her body. In a moment they were out of sight.

"Gawd help me an' I'll ketch him on th' next turn!"

He ran across the road and at one bound landed far down the mountain side. Aida did not hear his hopeful exclamation. But she remembered that she had a penknife of her father's in her pocket. She slipped her hand under the folds of her dress and worked the blade of the knife open. She little dreamed of the consequences of what she was about to do, and as little cared. Tragedies were not new to her. She grasped the handle firmly and her teeth ground together as she made one savage lunge, intending to sever, if possible, an artery in the captor's wrist, never pausing to consider what the result might be if she succeeded. She missed her mark

but struck the bridle reins severing them from Habor's hands. The severed reins fell among the horses' flying feet where they snapped and cracked like the lashes of whips.

"Whoa, Nelly! whoa! whoa! wh-o-a!" Habor coaxed, realizing the impending peril to both at that awful pace.

"Wh-o-a, lady; softly now; wh-o-a, good Nelly, whoa-wh-o-a."

Then he felt the sharp sting of the blade in his arm as Aida made a second thrust at him.

"Curse your infernal knife," and he caught her hand and rudely wrenched it from her grasp and flung it away.

For once the faithful steed refused to obey her master's will, and now that the reins were loose and all power of restraint gone she plunged down the steep grade more furiously than ever. Trees and rocks flashed past them and the overhanging boughs seemed to sing in their ears or, striking their faces, cut like sharp wires, while the shrieks of Aida and the curses of Habor were added to the resounding thunder of the flying hoofs. Whipped by the reins which dangled among her feet and crazed by the pain of Habor's spurs the furious beast flung herself forward, feet front and rear almost on a level. Her eyes were fire. The foam flew from the bridle-bit and the blood dripped from her hot flanks. Her ears were thrown back and her head thrust forward until it seemed to rest on her outstretched legs, her mane

blowing like the spray of rain from the roof-cone. Uncontrollable and devil-haunted she seemed bent on the destruction of both captor and captive.

Down they came, swinging around the short second semi-circle of the swan's neck, the horse bending inward until Habor was almost torn from her back against the steep bank of the roadway. Hatless and white as the skirts of the girl in his arms—skirts now stained with blood from his wounded wrist—Habor clung with one hand to the pommel of the saddle while that shodden thunderbolt bored her way like a conical shell around the red highway. Both riders were silent now. The cheeks of each were white as snow. They expected that wild Mazeppa flight would land them before God.

As the terrible animal hurled herself around the curve, Gyp fired, but the wild creature never wavered in her flight. Habor uttered a cry of pain, swung to one side, clasped his hand upon his side and seemed about to fall from the saddle, then regained his position as that palpitant thunderbolt hurled herself past Gyp and disappeared in a cloud of dust. Gyp saw the outstretched hand of Aida as she passed and heard her vanishing cry:

“Oh, Gyp! Gyp!”

CHAPTER XX

THE APPLE WOMAN

THE report of Aida's capture produced the utmost consternation in the camp of the loyalists. Col. Moncure was dazed for a time. The thought of his child being in the power of the wicked and relentless Habor made him sick at heart. Gyp was wild in his excitement and almost furious in his insistence that something must be done at once to rescue her from the villain's clutches. Dawson and Thompson and Snickerby and all the rest of them urged immediate action. There was but one mind in their councils. At all hazards Aida must be rescued.

After the first fury of the awful tidings had passed they set themselves to consider the situation. Gyp was satisfied that his rifle shot had wounded the Confederate scout. His swaying in the saddle after the shot was fired, the clasp- ing of his hand on his side and his unsteadiness for the moment satisfied them that he must have been sorely wounded. As a consequence one of two things would happen, Aida would be left at the nearest camp of the Confederates, or, possibly, at the first home of those who were in hearty sympathy with the Southern cause. With loss

of blood and the pain of a possible serious injury the flight could not be continued far. The first thing, therefore, was for the swiftest riders to follow at once. Indeed, if the wound were severe, the girl might have been dropped by the wayside and, therefore, all the more need of haste.

Perk Thompson and Sam Sharp were in their saddles before the conference was ended, and their flight down the Red Swan's Neck would have done credit to Habor's spirited bay, Nellie. From the point of the crags the little group stood watching the flight of the two horsemen. They saw them come around the bend of the road on the crest of the distant spur, a moment outlined against the peerless blue of heaven, then a cloud of dust from the red scar of a highway and the riders disappeared to come again into view down in the valley, then over the bridge and away by the stream until they were but specks in the distance. A vanishing blur and all was lost to view.

The riders thought at once of old Bridget, the apple woman, who lived alone in a crude shack in a secluded nook hidden away from the public road. She was known to be in fullest sympathy with the Confederate cause. It had been known for some time that she visited their camp to dispose of fruit and toothsome tidbits of cookery. To her home the horsemen dashed in the hope of either finding Aida or of gaining information.

The old woman at first positively refused to tell anything. But when Thompson threatened

immediate hanging for being in league with the enemy, she promised to tell all she knew. She told them that Habor had stopped there and had asked her to take care of the girl for a few days. But she had only one room in her miserable abode and no possible place where the captive could be concealed, and she did not dare take charge of her. She confessed everything; how that Habor was sorely injured and was bleeding profusely, was weak through the loss of blood and was scarcely fit to continue his flight. His wound she had dressed as well as could be; his bridle reins were gathered up and his trembling steed, wet with sweat and white with foam, urged on.

Without waiting for further information Perk and Sam leaped into their saddles and were off in swift pursuit. They reached the crest of Mont Aloe and swung around its summit to the southern side, and there, before them lay a most wondrous vision—forests and valleys, blue streams and cabin homes, orchards and many fraternal mountains, and on the slopes of green fields far away lay the camp of the Confederates. Thompson lifted his glass to his eyes. The white tents were distinctly outlined. He could see the horses coralled and the pickets on duty. Then his hand trembled, his teeth ground together, an oath leaped from his livid lips, and, handing the glass to Sharp, he exclaimed:

“The cursed wretch!”

Sharp gazed a moment, lowered the glass and turned to Thompson, the hate fairly burning in his eyes.

"It's all up, Perk."

"No need t' ride further."

"It will kill Moncure."

"Not a bit of it. It will stir him to fury."

"It must be strategy now."

"We'll hafter go back an' consult."

Their spirits sank as they turned their horses about and galloped homeward.

"What next, Sam?"

"That's th' question: What next?" was Sharp's hopeless answer.

"One thing's sartin, something gotter be done an' done at onct."

"We gotter git inside that ar camp, somehow."

"It will be at th' peril of our lives."

"It's life fer life, Perk, life fer life."

"And th' life of th' girl's of more value than yourn or mine."

For awhile there was silence between them as they rode on together. Perk was the first to speak.

"An idee, Sam, an idee! be hevins I got an idee."

"Lemmy hev it."

"Old Irish Bridget must git Aida out."

"But she's on their side!"

"That's the very reason why she must serve us."

"How? I'm waitin'."

"Well, th' fust thing's t' git th' old woman."

"Then what?"

"Bridget fust and plans afterward."

"Yer hain't a supposin' they'd exchange Aida fer that old Irish apple woman, be you?"

"No, sir-ee. They hain't sech fools. They wouldn't exchange Aida fer all the women in the county, least not at this time. We must get Aunt Bridget on our way back and carry her into camp and then make our plans."

"It won't be diff'cult job t' git th' old woman."

"Well, she's jes' gotter be got. That's all ther is to it; an' that's th' only way out of it that I see."

The horsemen rode up to Aunt Bridget's shack. She was sitting by the door with a basket of apples preparing to start for the Confederate camp.

"Don't yer want a ride, Bridget?"

"Not wid the loikes av yez."

"O come, now. We'll give yer a lift on yer way."

"Divil the lift wull ye give a body, bad luck to yez. It's up to some haythen divilment ye are. I can see it in the bloody eyes ave ye. Aff wid yez an' lave a poor body alone."

"Sam'll take yer basket, Bridget, an' ye can jump up in front of me."

"And d'ye think it's hankerin' afther yer society, I am? Yez'll not be takin' me to the

camp where I'm wantin' to go. I know yez well; yer not that sort, ye bloody Unioners."

"I'll promise ye, Bridget, we'll see that ye git thar an' no harm t' ye."

"That's th' livin' truth, Bridget; he's not lyin' t' ye," Sam added.

"An a shwate bit av a crayther I'd be ridin' through the mountains wid a mon's arm about me. Aff wid ye fer a haythen blackguard."

"Ye needn't be a mistrustin' us, fer ye hev t' come along. Y' see how it is, Bridget."

"I see. I'm in your power, an' I'm too ould to fight. I'll go because I have to, bad scram to the min who would shtale an ould body loike me."

"Give me your hand an' jump right up. Sam'll take yer basket an' look atter yer apples."

Moncure, Dawson, Gyp, and, indeed, the whole camp were still on the outlook watching for the return of Thompson and Sharp.

"O Mr. Moncure!" cried Gyp excitedly, as he handed the glass to the Colonel. "They'r comin'! They'r comin'! an' they've got Aida! They've got Aida! I seed 'em comin' down th' hill."

Moncure took the glass and looked long and eagerly; then lowered it with a sigh.

"It's not she, Gyp. They'r bringing a woman, but is not Aida. They have evidently not found her," and Col. Moncure turned away to hide his emotion.

There was no little surprise when Thompson and Sharp returned with the old apple woman, a

haggard, shriveled crone, instead of the beautiful girl who had been carried away. There was amazement and no little disgust when, at first, they saw them ascending the Red Swan's Neck carrying the bent and decrepit woman rather than the beloved one for whom they had been so anxiously waiting.

"What's the meaning of this, Thompson?" Moncure asked with no little sternness but more of confusion in his tone.

"I'll explain, fer we're all disapinted. We came to this old woman's shack and learned that Habor had stopped there with the girl. Habor wanted her to keep Aida fer a few days; but she would not because she was afear'd. Habor is badly wounded, she says, an' weak f'm th' loss of blood. She helped him dress the wound and then he hurried on carryin' th' girl with him. We rushed away on th' full gallop an' when we had rounded the shoulder o' Mont Aloe, we saw th' camp of th' enemy. An' while we were lookin', what did we see but Habor rushing in through the picket lines with Aida in his arms. We saw the men surround her, toss ther caps in th' air an' lead her away t' her tent. Then we returned to Aunt Bridget's place an' arrested her just as she was leaving fer th' Confed'rate camp."

Moncure and Gyp were heartbroken at the report. There was universal sadness and disappointment. There was silence for a moment, when Moncure, recovering himself, asked:

"What do you propose to do with this old woman?"

"She must secure the release of Aida!"

"She? How?"

"That's th' question now to be decided."

"What have you to suggest?"

"Somethin' after this sort: You know she's been in th' habit o' visitin' th' camp almost daily with knicknacks, gimcracks an' thingumbobs of one sort an' a nuther t' sell t' th' soldiers. She has th' confidence o' them people. But she must be made our friend an' go inside th' camp an' find out all about Aida; meet with her; speak with her, out o' hearin' o' th' others, of course, an' comfort th' poor girl with th' assurance that help'll come soon. Then come back to us, tell us what she finds, an' then we can lay our plans fer rescue. Thet's my idee."

Gratitude shone in the wounded father's eyes. His heart seemed to be somewhat eased of its great burden at the plausibility of Thompson's plan. He went up to him and, grasping him by the hand, said:

"Thompson, God bless you; God bless you! Sharp, May heaven ever be your friend. I don't seem to be equal to this great calamity. You know she's all I have. But come now, let us consult together, for we must act at once."

"This woman must be bribed," said Thompson. "We must make it worth her while to play th' traitor. That's all ther is in it."

"I will see her at once," was Moncure's emphatic response. "For the present everything depends upon her."

The father, weak from his grief, and suppressing every feeling of casuistry, went over to the little cabin where Bridget was detained and said to her:

"Bridget, you and I must get better acquainted. You have been a friend of the South. That is your right. It is your privilege to take whatever side appeals to your judgment and patriotism. You have your beliefs as the rest of us have ours. We will not harm one hair of your head. You will be just as safe with us as with your best friends, and we will prove to you that we are, indeed, better than any friend you have on the other side, if you will do what we would like to have you do."

"Phwat wull ye be afther havin' me do?" with stern emphasis and flashing eyes.

"Nothing harmful, you may be sure. Listen to me a minute. You know Jim Habor?"

"Faith I do thot, an' a brave sojer mon he is."

"He called at your house to-day with a young lady?"

"He did, Sor."

"That young lady was my daughter."

"Praise be! But she's the beauty: as foine a little leddy as I ever clapped me two eyes on."

"Habor carried her off to his camp, didn't he?"

"Thot he did, wid the blood shtramin' from his soide where some crool mon had shot him."

"Badly wounded, was he?"

"He may be dead afore this wid the pain av him."

"Now, Bridget, I want my daughter back, and you must help me get her."

"The saints presarve us!" she cried with upstretched hands. "I'm no a god nor a ginal. She's beyent me power, Mishter Moncure."

"Bridget, if you'll help me get my daughter I will give you one thousand dollars and place you beyond the possibility of want as long as you live. You won't have to sell any more apples or work hard as you do now."

"Great hivins, mon! ye talk loike a king. Thot's more money than I've seen in all Ameriky." And then after a moment's reflection, "But if they foind it out they'll hang me to the rafters ave me shanty; an phwat gude's a thoosand dollars to an ould woman wid her neck in a schling?"

"Bridget, there's not the least bit of danger, if you are discreet. Those people over in the camp all know you, and they are all your friends. There is not one of them that will ever suspect you. If they should examine you, have nothing suspicious about your person, and you will be all right. As soon as my child is rescued the thousand dollars will be put in your hands. You can stay in our camp, if you wish, till the war is over, and I will then take you north, or I will

send you back to Ireland to see your old home and friends."

That last remark was a master stroke. At the mention of her old home in the green Isle the tears came into the old body's eyes. It had been the dream of her life to get back to Killarney. It was enough. Moncure had conquered with one line. All the wit and cunning of her race would be at his service.

"I'm wid yez, Mishter Moncure. Wan flag's as gude as another to me, when me heart is back in ould Oirland. Phwat do yez want me to do?"

"Take your basket of apples and go to the camp just as you intended doing. Act as you have always done. Do not be different in any way. But find out all you can about my daughter. See her if you can without awakening suspicion. Tell her for me to keep heart and be brave, though no need to do that, for no braver girl ever lived, and come back to us this evening and report. Gyp will take you on horseback to Mont Aloe, and will meet you this evening after dark at your shack."

"The blissin' av hivin be on yez an' comfort yez for yer daughter. I'll see her if I have to choke the sintry. But that's a bit av a crack I'm havin' wid yez. I'll be joodishus."

CHAPTER XXI

A MOUNTAIN MINE

"THEY'LL not send us an offer of exchange," was Moncure's reflection as the men conferred together. "They will wait for the terms to come from us. The distress is ours, not theirs. They will wait till the anxiety with us becomes unendurable."

"But, Kernal," Thompson ventured, "the purpose o' that ar' gang beyond Mont Aloe is to suppress our camp, an' th' sooner th' better, fer them. If they can bring us to terms by usin' Aida they'll do it 'ithout waitin' fer a proposition f'm us."

"Would they expect us to make a proposition to throw down our arms and take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy in exchange for a young girl, however dear she may be to us? They may hope to force us to that point but they will not expect us to propose such terms."

"Do you intend then to wait?"

"Not one moment later than Bridget's return. If she brings any definite information relative to the situation on which we can base action we will lay our plans at once. You saw their camp. Is it strong?"

"Not more than fifteen or twenty tents. Maybe not so many. And its only a band o' bushwhackers an' gorillers."

"If the worst comes to the worst we will attack them in the night, destroy their camp and rescue my daughter."

"Ther might be danger t' th' girl in a night attack, or in any attack. They'll expect it an' prepare for it. We'll plan when Biddy comes; for that we must wait."

"Well, here she is now."

"News fer yez, Mishter Moncure."

"What is it, Bridget? Is Aida safe?"

"Yer daughter's in the camp beyent."

"Yes, Kernal," Gyp hurried to add, "an she saw Aida!"

"Thot I did, an' she's in a noice comfortable tint, watched over be a woman wid the name o' Shnags!"

"Great hevings!" roared Thompson, "It hain't as bad as that, is it?"

"Can it be possible?" Moncure added; "your first intimation filled me with hope; your last declaration is enough to drive one to despair, or to infuriate vengeance." His fingers clutched into the palms of his hands until they almost bled. "That's not good news, Bridget. We could hardly expect anything worse than for her to be in the hands of that revengeful and brutal creature."

"Sure, there was no harrum bein' done to the

girrul. She was layin' there in her bunk as peaceful as a saint at her prayers. But the saints whin they pray don't lie on the broad av their backs. She lay there, the shwate face av her shmilin' on yez loike the bit av an angel she is, sor."

"Did you speak with her?"

"Sure for you, Mishter Moncure, I did thot. But I had to be joodishus. The scowlin' crayther they be callin' Shnags, though afore the war they do be callin' her Molly Groocher, was a listenin' to ivery wurred, an' it was right for her, for ye will raymimber that I'm a bit rebel whin I'm in thot camp. An' I had to invint a bit av a strategy. I looked aboot me, an' I saw no wather in the tint. Av coorse at that I wanted a drink; an' I up an' sez I to Shnags, sez I, sure an' have yez a bit o' wather in yer tint to reflash an ould Oirish woman, knowin' all the whoile there wasn't a drap in the hoose. Ye see I was actin' joodishus. 'Naw,' sez she, 'but if yez'll be afther watchin' the wench'—ye see she was so insultin' an' the shwate baby not sayin' a wurred—'I'll be aff to the shpring an' get yez a drap to wet yer whistle.' Wid thot I handed her a big roond apple as rid and shwate as iver yez clapped yer two jaws on. 'An,' sez I, 'D'ye see thim claws o' mine,' sez I, doublin' up me fingers loike thot. 'I'll spile the beauty o' the winch,' sez I, 'if she begins any tantrums or foolishness wid me.' An' wid thot Shnags was pleased, an' she up an' aff

to the shpring. Thin I whishpered to the girrul, an' sez I, 'Be aisy wid ye now, Aida. Whist ye, sez I, not a wurrid o' this thot I'm tellin' yez, or be St. Patrick, sez I, it's death till both av us, an' wull ye moind thot?' sez I. 'Yer father sint me to yez. Be aisy and don't fret,' sez I. 'He tould me to tell ye to be brave,' sez I. 'He's prayin' fer yez, an' he'll have ye out o' this cursed place afore Sunday. Whist ye, now niver a wurred, or be the saints it's all wan wid the two av us; yez'll be kill't an' me own ould neck'll shwing fer it. An' how,' sez I, 'would this wrinkled ould thrapple look wid a halter aroond it?' An' wid thot she shmoiled an' said: 'Bliss ye, Bridget, an' kiss papa for me.' But I'll be joodishus, Mishter Moncure; I'll not insist on carryin' out yer girrul's instructions, but to pacify the child I told her I'd be happy to carry out her wull in thot mather."

"Did she look worn or distressed?"

"She looked white loike."

"Was she injured by the ride?"

"Shure she made no complaint, an' I didn't ask her. There was nothin' wrong wid the child except bein' tired an' narvous loike."

"How about the camp?"

"In phwat way, Mishter Moncure?"

"Many men in it?"

"I couldna be afther tellin' yez; but I'm thinkin' not more than twinty min, an' half o' them away most av the toime."

"Where is Aida's tent located in its relation to the others?"

"D'e raymimber the field o' Tim Mecune?"

"I know where it is," Snickerby responded eagerly. "I used t' dig coal over there."

"Well thin, sor, yez'll be raycallin' the place. The tint is located where ye took the coal out. The land's fallin' in and it's left a sort av depression in the soide av the hill, a sort av gully; an' a bit av a shtrame comes out where the moine's tumbled in. Her tint is joost in there, if ye wull, sor."

"I know th' place," Snickerby answered, excitedly. "I once helped to put out coal there. But it didn't pay, an' we gave up diggin' on that side o' th' mounting, an' made an entry on th' other side. The timbers of th' platform an' th' ones at th' entry were then taken around to the other side o' th' mounting to th' new openin', an' th' old mine fell in leavin' th' depression which Biddy speaks of. I hev an idee!"

"Indade an' it makes a cozy bit av a place, the place where the gurrel's tint is sitchooated. It's retoired loike."

"Jeerusalem! Jeerusalem! I've got it, Snickerby; I've got it!" exclaimed Perk at the top of his voice, jumping excitedly to his feet and slapping his leg with vehemence.

"Phwat the divil's ailin' yez!" and Bridget looked at him in amazement. "Is it crazy ye are? or is it fleas or wasps?"

"Snickerby," roared Thompson, ignoring the interrogations of the apple woman. "You know th' inside o' that mine?"

"Every foot of it; an' I know what yer thinkin' about. I see yer pint, fer I had it first. Hal-lelujy! We'll have that girl out o' that hornet's nest afore this time t'morrer!"

"Explain yourselves, men. I don't understand."

"Why, Kernal, it's as clear as th' moon. Don't yer see? The girl's at one end o' th' mine. We can go in at th' tother end, dig through an' git 'er!"

"Hooray! Yep, yep, yep! We'll git 'er out; we'll gitter out; we'll gitter out in th' mornin'." And Perk and Sam Sharp executed a double clog among the leaves.

"Heaven help us! But are you sure you can trace the old mine?"

"Sure; ab-so-loote-ly, Kernal. I know every foot of it. What's t' hinder from goin' into th' mine, makin' our way by th' light o' lamps to th' blind end, dig through into th' Johnnies' camp, pick up the girl an' bring her home? Ye see they can't foller us in the mine."

"All we gotter do is dig through that ar thin crust into the gully whar Biddy says her tent is," confirmed Thompson.

"It looks workable, gentlemen. We'll try it, and at once. Get your picks and at nightfall we start."

"Hooray, an' it's now fer th' game!" shouted Dawson, as he started to leave.

"Wait a minute, men. There are a few things to consider before we start. It may take days to dig through; then you have Snags and the gang of ruffians to contend with. We must carry both picks and guns."

"Th' thing can be done in a few hours. It all depends. I know that mine. Every foot of it. I've worked in it when coal was put out just where that ar tent is. I helped drive the entry f'm th' tother side. We can do it, and we will!"

"Now yer talkin'! That's th' way t' put it. We can an' we will, an' we'll get right at it," and Perk started for his pick and gun.

"But, men, wait. Let us complete our plans. Aida ought to know about this, and be ready to join us if we succeed in getting through."

"Ther' hain't goin' to be no 'if' in this plan. We're a gwine t' git thar."

"But if we should break through into the tent suddenly where she and Snags are, and perhaps others, they might be frightened and flee into the camp, and we might lose the day at the very moment of success. Let the plan be fully matured. Bridget," inquired Moncure, turning to the old woman, "do you think any of the Johnnies suspected you to-day?"

"Niver the wan, Mishter Moncure. If they had, sure I wouldn't been here. I'd a been roostin' in the guard hoose."

"Do you think that you could go again and tell Aida to be on the lookout for us if the earth should give way back of her tent?"

"Whin Mishter Moncure gives the wurred I'm right wid yez."

"Then, Bridget, get away a little earlier to-morrow morning to the camp, tempt Snags Groucher from the tent, and while she is out tell Aida of our plans. If you fail, everything may fail."

"An' I'll not fail. Trust an ould Oirish woman for thot. I'll outwit the Shnags crather, an' I will be joodishus. Ye have me han' on that, Mishter Moncure."

"Just remember dear old Ireland and keep your wits where you can use them."

"Sure an' I'll see Killarney afore the snow flies, or me name's not Bridget O'Hallaran. I love th' Johnny byes, an' I loves yez all, now that I'm wid yez, but oh, you dear ould Immerald Isle! An' it's now yer daughter, Mishter Moncure. Ye'll see her th' morrow, rest yer sowl, gude mon! An' I'll be aff this minute an' get me baskets ready for th' mornin'."

"And the rest of us will be in the mine before the stars come out."

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It was late the following afternoon. Bridget, Aida and Snags were in the tent. Snags was loud in her denunciation of "the brutal gang" of mountaineers who had hanged her friend Ter-

baccy Tom, and would have hanged her if she had not outwitted them. She gloried in the escape of herself and Col. Maxwell, and now of the capture of the daughter of the ringleader of the villainous crew, and it wouldn't be long until she would see the whole set of them swinging from some good hickory. She hoped how soon she might enjoy the sight.

"An' how is the mon, Habor?" inquired Bridget. "Too bad, Miss Groocher, thot a brave sojer lad loike him should be on the broad av his back wid a bloody woond in the chist av him, an' him a sufferin' so."

"He'll get well all right. Then woe to the gang on the mountain top! He'll give that sniffin' pup, Gyp, two or three holes as good as he's got."

"If Gyp had not been afraid of injuring me," Aida asserted in defense of her friend, "your Habor, instead of lying in his comfortable tent, would have been lying on the broad of his back on the Red Swan's Neck, dead, as he deserved to be!"

"Hear the loikes av her, Miss Groocher; did yez iver! She's l'yal to her daddy an' the rist o' them. She's not subjoosed yet, be me sowl," and the wink which Bridget gave to the captive maid was very different from what her words to Snags implied, but which the young girl fully understood.

"You oughter be thankful yer livin' 'stead o' complainin' ag'n the man who might have dashed

ye to pieces when ye jabbed him with yer bloody knife." And Snags snarled like a wild beast on the brave girl. "He risked his life t' save ye, ye ungrateful huzzy!"

"Risked his life!" Aida scornfully retorted; "what's a man's life worth who shamefully attacks unprotected girls and runs away for fear of a boy! A savage Indian would have been more brave."

"His life's worth more'n any little doll-faced wench like you!"

"Evidently he regarded his life worth more than his honor and his manliness. He has put himself on a level with savages, while Gyp stands out as a hero."

"He captured ye for yer good, ye huzzy!"

"And Gyp shot him for his good. Habor did his vile work and now he is reaping his wages."

"And you'll git yourn afore we're through with you," and the frown on Snags' face was satanic.

"Hist ye, now. Phwat's the gude o' all this blatherin'? Yez have got to live together fer a while, an' why not live peaceable? Yez have gone far enough, the two av yez. Be gude an' heed an' ould Oirish body. Yer both noice bodies. I say, Miss Groocher, wad yez moind goin' doon to the tint where thot gude sojer mon, Habor, is an' ast him if I could be av any hellup to him. Ye see I don't have a great deal to occepy me toime, an' if I can be av use tell him Bridget is at his sarvice."

"He don't know yer," Snags answered.

"Be hivins, he knows me well. Sure and wasn't it meselluf that he was after askin' to take this bit av an inimy whin he fled wid her and come to me hoose, bleeding loike a shtuck pig. An' didn't I bind up the woond av him an' fix his bridle-reins, cut by this darin' yoong thing when flyin' doon the moontain? Ah, Miss Groocher, there's none that he knows bether than Bridget O'Hallaran. Tell him, and he'll raymimber. Sure I'd loike t' see him, an' hellup him, if me sarvice 'd be wilcome."

"Will you stay with this impudent creature while I'm gone? Habor asked me to come to his tent this afternoon. He wanted to give some instruction about this impertinent thing. May be he wants to marry her!"

"The saints presarve him if he does."

"Will ye stay?" Snags inquired.

"Trust me for kapin' the girrul till yez coom back."

Scarcely had Bridget reminded Aida of the plan of her friends for her rescue, until her listening ears heard a muffled sound which she recognized as the breaking of the picks through the earth back of the tent.

"Be aisy now, me shwate leddy. Don't get excited. It's yoore friends. Be calm an' joo-dishus."

Bridget stooped down, raised the side of the tent and peeped out; and there, grinning through

a great hole in the hill were the faces of Snickerby and Judy Gans.

"All ready, Sykes?"

"All ready, Bridget."

Bridget seized a knife which lay on the bench by her side and slashed the tent from top to bottom, and the sides fell apart showing the entrance to the mine.

"Jump, Aida, at wance, and yoore safe."

Aida sprang through the opening and was caught in the arms of her father who smothered her with caresses and kisses. Gyp stood by waiting his turn, which he feared would never come. Bridget, without waiting for her baskets leaped into the opening after Aida and was royally welcomed. At that moment Snags returned, and seeing the tent empty and the side rent in twain uttered a scream of alarm and turned to flee for help, when Thompson and Sam Sharp leaped through the throat of the mine, seized the woman, thrust a handkerchief into her mouth and dragged her into the opening. Once safely in the mine her hands were tied and the gag removed, with the command that if she uttered any outcry it would be immediately replaced.

"Remember, Snags, the stiller the better. But we'll see that you do not climb up any more chimbleys."

CHAPTER XXII

THE CAVERNS

MONCURE and his band had their headquarters in a rambling structure which stood drearily a short distance beyond a ledge of rocks which overlooked a narrow plateau. A flight of steps cut in the ledge connected the two levels. The building was old, stained by storms, but was apparently as strong as when erected in some far distant time. It looked as if it had been smitten with the pestilence that walketh in darkness and the destruction that wasteth at noonday. Old, storm-beaten, weather-worn, it determined not to give way to the ravages of time. The trees about it rose stark and appealingly. Their leafless arms craved sympathy for some great misfortune that had overtaken them and moaned in the souging winds like the spirits of the lost. Over the walls a gnarled wistaria climbed, or rather clung, for it was dead as the ghostly sentinels that reared their skeleton forms nearby. Honey-suckles clasped the inhospitable façade and hung dumb and marrowless in their last embrace. Over the stark trees the wild grape once climbed, but there was now neither leaf nor blossom nor purple cluster in all their disconsolate vines.

The building was of stone and had long ceased to be the habitation of man. When it was built, why or by whom, no one seemed to know. It had evidently been a castle of defense in former times, but had been abandoned when the necessity for its use ceased. It was three stories in height, and, with the exception of the first floor, there was no division into rooms. The entrance was from the side facing the ledge and opened into a large apartment with stone floor and concrete walls. It was probably used in time of war as a mess-room, and was so used now by Moncure and his men. This apartment was succeeded by a tortuous outlet, or hallway, narrow and dark, which rambled into a chamber about equal in size with the mess-room. This was the kitchen, or cook-room. From the crooked hallway stalls led off on either side into darkness and emptiness. The second apartment was dismal. It was dimly lighted from embrasures near the ceiling. Other than these narrow, oblong openings there were no windows.

There was no means of communication between the first and second floors; but a spiral stairway of stone ran up a sort of enclosed tower built of the same material, and passed through the second to the third floor. The second floor was entered by trap doors opening from the third story on stairs which dropped down to the floor below. There were three or four of these stairways at equal intervals along the east side of the

room. These flights of steps could be raised by weights like the terminal of a modern fire-escape. About four feet from the floor a line of embrasures, or slanting portholes, ran around the building. The floor had similar openings in various parts, so that riflemen could command not only all approach to the building; but should the enemy succeed in forcing an entrance to the lower story they were sure to be shot down by marksmen in the room overhead. In times of danger all entrance to the third floor by means of the stairway was shut off by a stone trap which swung to its place by means of tackle and grapples. The walls of stone without and concrete within reduced the possibility of fire and the danger from musketry or arrows to the minimum. This second floor was without division into apartments, and was large enough to accommodate fifty or more men.

The third story, like the second, was one long room extending from one end of the building to the other. Here were blankets rolled up and thrown in heaps. Clothing hung on the walls and boxes of ammunition and provision were distributed here and there without much system or order. Guns were stacked in the corners or rested in forked brackets. The room was cold, dreary and inhospitable, yet in the event of an attack a place of almost absolute safety. As a final safeguard, a tunnel passed from the third floor, and also one from the first, back into the

side of the mountain. These connected, like the two arms of a Y, with a third, and this in turn communicated with a subterranean cavern whose ramifications and exit were known only to the little band themselves.

To this early war-time structure Snags Groucher was brought by Thompson, Snickerby and Judy Gans.

"Ther'll be no climbin' up th' chimbly this time," Perk began by way of reminder to the captive woman.

"We'll put her underground whar she'll be safe," Snickerby added, with no double entendre in his remark.

"D'ye mean t' bury me alive, ye gorillers?" and Snags looked as if she would tear them both to pieces.

"Oh, no, weuns gwine t' be real good. Ye know th' Good Book says, 'Love yer enemies,'" Judy replied with audacious irony, "ye've been so sweet an' gentle to our friends. We'll put yer in a house safer'n any king ever lived in, an' stronger."

Snags was at a loss to understand these insinuations, tantalizing rather than wicked. But she had made up her mind to go to the stake if need be, but she would curse them in the flames.

They led her, blindfolded, through the mess-room and into the dark, crooked conduit and out to the kitchen end of the fort. At the northwest corner, where the spiral stairway started on its

mission to the third floor, Perk stooped down, threw back a sunken bolt, raised a door and threw it against the wall. The opening disclosed a flight of stairs leading down into a dismal and gruesome chamber. A lamp burned dimly in a niche in the wall, filling the place with a sickly light and a vile odor. Sykes lifted the lamp from its niche and the three passed across the chamber to the opposite side. Here a heavy, creaking door was thrown open and they entered the tunnel. It was cool and damp, smelt of the underworld and was pitch dark except for the feeble light which Sykes carried in his hand. This passageway, with its phantom lights and shades, led them, after a few windings, into a wide and spectral cavern. The bandage was then taken from the captive woman's eyes.

"I'll light th' lamps fer ye, Snags," and with that Judy Gans, a little more sympathetic than formerly, touched a match to a large oil jet, and then to another, whereupon the whole interior flashed in prismatic and scintillant splendor. The cavern was most dazzling in its beauty. The walls and ceiling blazed with indescribable pyrotechny. Stalactites glistened everywhere and stalagmites glowed like mushrooms and tufts of strange herbage crystallized and gleaming from a thousand angles. White cones and alabaster columns, rosettes of porphyry, masses of onyx mixed with curious shapes of chalcedony, tangled masses of scintillant filigree and arches of short, sharp tusks

that dripped and sparkled like stars. The startling beauty of the scene caused the group of invaders, captors and captive alike, to stand and gaze upon that wonderworld. Their hard natures seemed to soften and the red blood of war was swallowed up in the alabastrine purity of the scene. All were compelled for the moment to suppress their hate and give way to mutual expressions of admiration. At length Snags Groucher turned to Judy Gans and said, with a touch of tenderness in her voice:

"Be yer goin' t' put me in this shinin' place?"

"For a spell."

"I won't mind it."

"It's what we be callin' Heaven's Subway; but ther' ain't no stick-an-mud-chimble fer ye t' climb out by, so enj'y yerself," and Judy wrinkled her short nose and smiled like a pumpkin on halloween.

Sykes endeavored to break into the amenities by saying:

"We'll try to have Habor here some of these days t' share your underground heavin'. It haint good, ye know, fer a woman t' be alone."

"Oh, but yer kind, ye big gawk!" and the woman bowed sarcastically.

"You'll find a chair and a cot over there," said Judy as they turned and lighted themselves out, leaving the captive woman to her own reflections. Meanwhile Gyp and Aida had broken away from Col. Moncure and the others and were felicita-

ting themselves in each other's presence. They tripped down the stone steps on the ledge, and, hand in hand went back to the rustic bower where the now happy girl had met with her terrible experience. It seemed almost an age to them, so wonderfully do the hours impose themselves upon us when the heart's grief closes other inlets. Back to the old trysting place they went, where once again they seated themselves and let their souls flow into one roseate channel which hope, sweet hope, carved for them through green valleys of fellowship. After all trial has for us all its aftermath where heaven comes to remind us of the sweet bliss of the immortals.

"Aida, I'm ten years older 'n when I wus here afore."

She looked into his joyous face with a happy smile and said:

"I do not see any wrinkles on your brow or any grey hairs on your head. But then I'm older, too. I've had experience enough to last me a lifetime. But I never was so happy, so ex-quis-ite-ly happy as now."

"Wasn't it awful?"

"I aged fifteen years on that Red Swan's Neck, and if the ride had lasted much longer I would have been in glory giving Methuselah pointers on longevity."

"You earned heav'n by that ride. I ain't much up on the glory country; but if I had anything t' do 'ith th' gates up thar they'd be as wide

open fer you when th' time comes, as Tim Mecune's coal mine was this atternoon."

"If I get through those gates as safely as I got through the mines I won't need to worry, will I, Gyp?"

"But you hain't agoin' fer awhile. I'll hold th' gates so yer can't get in."

"Would you deprive me of heaven, and you pretend to think so much of me?"

"I do think so much of ye; but I's gwineter give ye yer heaven here, if I can get a hold of it myself."

"Oh, I'm too old for any earthly paradise now. Look into my face. See the wrinkles since we were here last. Why, Gyp, I was then but fifteen. That was day before yesterday; but I somehow dropped twenty-five years between here and Camp Mecune. I said a minute ago, fifteen years, I'm sure it must have been a quarter of a century, and the ride was less than an hour."

"I've heard o' a thousan' years bein' as one day, an' one day as a thousan' years. But th' One who said that never gets any older. An' you'll never be a day older than you was day afore yesterday. God made ye an' put himself in ye and ther' won't be no wrinkles an' grey hairs." Gyp was somewhat proud of his learning, but remembered he'd heard Mr. Moncure say something like it the day before.

"Oh, what a terrible heretic you are! Well, Gyp, I lived at about that rate—a thousand years

in one day—when we were flying around the curves of that fearful highway.”

“Wasn’t ye afraid you would be killed?”

“Afraid? No, I did not care. I felt as if I’d rather be dashed to atoms and picked up as stardust at the resurrection, than be under the power of that awful man one moment. I was furious, but not afraid. I would have pulled him from the saddle if I could and gone to death with him. I forgot myself. I was out of myself. I was not I. I was in a trance. Whether in the body or out of the body I could not tell, and I did not care. I was an abstraction, with not a feeling I had ever known. I was one whom I had never seen before, and I pray God I may never see again. If there is such thing as the spirit leaving the body, and being someone else, I was that one, until unnerved and prostrate I came back to myself in Irish Bridget’s cabin.”

“What if I’d a shot yer when I fired at Habor.”

“Oh, I’d just sprouted wings and gone up to see mamma and wait for you.”

“I’d ruther hev ye here. Did ye see me afore I shot?”

“My dear boy, I did see you, and for the moment it brought me back to earth. I remembered you and papa, and I called till I thought my lungs would crack and my throat fly to pieces. The look on your face as we swept past, the utter anguish of it, set all my feelings to mutiny once more.”

"Aida, do you know I could a shot him dead if I hadn't been afraid o' hurtin' you? That's th' reason he was wounded 'stead o' bein' shot through th' heart. If I'd aimed nearer it would a put you in danger."

"At that moment, Gyp, I would rather have been shot by you than to be held by the arm of that brutal man."

"I'm awfully glad I didn't shoot as well as I could. I thought I could wound him so's he would haver let you go. But I thought a world had gone out o' me when, 'stead o' fallin' f'm th' saddle, he steadied himself and dashed away 'ith you."

"Well, it's all over now except the memories that have gone into my soul never to come out again. My nerves are in a shocking condition; but, thank God, I'm here."

"I'm afear'd it's not all over, Aida. If Habor ever gets well there'll be trouble fer you an' me."

"I fear it. He hissed his devilish insinuations in my ear when his bleeding arm was about me and his face was white as death."

"We must both be on our guard."

"We'll not be caught napping the next time."

"Was Snags good t' yer, Aida?"

"She was cross and hateful and swore at me and threatened to throw acid in my face if I attempted to get away."

"Well, she's safe now, where she won't bother anyone till the end o' th' war."

"And there was Bridget. Oh, I'm so glad papa's going to reward her."

"You owe your release largely to her."

"And to yourself, papa, Thompson, Sykes, Judy Gans and all the rest of them."

"I'm so happy you're back again on this bench, and well."

"After this I think I can be a better Christian."

"An' I'm gwine t' be better, too. If I'd a lost yer, Aida, there wouldn't a been no more heav'n fer me. The stars would a gone plum out an' I'd a died like a young hawk blow'd out o' th' nest."

"Would you have taken it so hard, Gyp?"

"Aida, I hain't got nobody in this world but jes you."

"That's what papa says," and she looked into his face with a bewitching smile.

"He'd a got over it."

"Don't you think you would have forgotten me soon if I had never come back?"

"Never. I'd a gone an' hunted up your grave an' dug down beside yer an' told them t' cover me over. I'd lie there fer ever'n ever an' never want t' waken."

"Oh, you young heathen; don't you believe in a resurrection?"

"What's that?"

"Getting awake at the judgment day."

"I don't want no judgment; an' what's th' use o' me gettin' awake if you be dead?"

"But I'll be awake, too."

"That's diff'nt. I'd git up mighty quick in the mornin' if I know'd you was about. But if you wasn't I'd jest sleep happy knowin' that you was down thar, too. What we gwine t' do when th' war's over?"

"I'm afraid that's too far off to plan for."

"There's nothin' too far away t' plan fer if ye want it. Say—what was that, Aida?" and both stopped to listen to a voice calling through the woods.

"It's Bridget," Aida responded, "wonder what she wants? There she comes. What is it, dear old soul? I could just hug you to my heart."

"Well, yez'd bether be careful an' not get the wrong wan in yer arrums. Y' look shwate and happy, but yoore father's afther wantin' to talk wid yez."

"I will go at once. Say, Bridget, won't you give me that old log cabin of yours for a souvenir?"

"For a phwat?"

"As a memento. You know now that you're going to Ireland you'll not want it any more."

"Thot I wull, my dear girrul. I'll give it to ye and yoore shwate bye, Gyp. An' yez may shtart hoosekapin' in it; an' hiven grant yez lots o' little Gyps."

"Shame on you, Bridget. What does papa want?"

CHAPTER XXIII

MISS LARUE

ANOTHER horseman came riding up the tortuous highway of the Red Swan's Neck; but this one carried the stars and stripes. His horse was jaded, but he urged him to the limit of his speed. Waving his loyal flag he called to the mountaineers who were eagerly watching his every movement. But his words fell short of their destination. He was alone and there was no fear of a surprise; besides the flag that he bore was his security. Up the hill he came, the panting horse wet with his long journey, the foam dripping from his bridle bits and his distended nostrils red with the fire in his heated blood.

"Victory! Victory!" cried the unknown, waving his silken banner. "Lee has surrendered and the war is over. Peace! Peace!"

"What! the war at an end?"

"Yes," answered the stranger, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Moncure shouted his welcome to the herald of peace, and raising his hand toward heaven, cried: "All hail the power of Jesus name!"

Men threw their guns on the ground and their caps into the trees and danced over the grass like

children in a May-day festival, shouting and singing the "Star Spangled Banner," "The Red, White and Blue," "Yankee Doodle," and other airs. Bedlam broke loose, and everybody was happy. Then Aida took up the patriotic strains of "Home, Sweet Home," but she had not progressed far until tears were on many cheeks, and she herself was obliged to stop in the midst of the song. What one had not suffered in his home? Gyp's was in ashes. Moncure's and Aida's was long since a ruin, only the bleak walls, windowless and ragged, remained. Judy Gans' nose winked and twinkled furiously. Nobody had bothered her cabin, and she had installed Snickerby as a protecting ægis—her suffering was purely vicarious, yet she wept with the rest of them. "The war is over! The war is over!" The news spread like wildfire over all the mountains and into every camp, fortress and stronghold. Prison doors flew open and pickets were called in. Now the warriors will go back to their homes, lay aside their implements of warfare, forget their animosities and resume the arts of peace. There was rejoicing on both sides of the conflict, and all were glad that the terrible days of fratricidal war were over.

Gyp was the first to leave the camp. The herald of glad tidings brought a special message for him. It was imperative. His uncle had died and a legacy awaited him, but upon certain conditions. One of these was that he become com-

panion and helper of the widow in her grief and feebleness. It was with great reluctance and no little sadness that he bade good-bye to his friends. With Aida the parting was peculiarly tender. It seemed like dropping out of his life all that gave happiness to it. As he had said to her once before, she was all that he had, and now she could not even tell him where her lot would be cast. She must be with her father, North or South, but which of the twain she knew no more than her disconsolate sweetheart. He was therefore obliged to leave without knowing where her address would be. He was glad that the cruel war was over, but now that the end had come there was for him a crumbling of castles and a confusion of hopes and dear anticipations. All his dreams were coming back to him and, like autumn leaves, falling dead around him. Doubts and misgivings rushed in upon him with nothing tangible anywhere. Would she send her address? If it were possible she would do so. So they parted, a grief in each heart, a genuine sorrow which the victory at Appomattox could not allay. It was a severing of natures that had grown to be everything to each other, and for how long, neither knew.

Gyp's soul sank within him as he came down the red highway in company with the herald of peace. At the last turn of the road he looked back. Aida stood out in full view, her handkerchief giving quivering puffs of encouragement and

occasionally finding its way to her eyes. He paused, and in spite of the stranger by his side, threw a kiss backward. Aida returned the affectionate salutation and then the cruel earth came between them and the vision was swallowed up in the great, weltering tide of time and change. Alas, for the dreams that we dream and the castles that we build.

No one could have been more tender to his aged aunt than this strong young man fresh from the rugged experience of the camp and the hardships of civil war. He did everything that a heart could do softened by tender and pathetic experiences and made thoughtful by the fact that this helpless relative had lost her stay and strength, and in her feebleness and grief had no one to lean upon. It was little that kind hands could do. The grief over her great loss was an ever abiding presence. It gnawed like a vulture at her bleeding heart and would not cease. After a few months of unappeasable heartache she gave up the struggle and went to join her companion beyond the veil.

The following years passed away like a watch in the night. Gyp dreamed his dreams. He builded his castles, only to see them dissolve at his feet. He planned for a future when Aida and he would meet again, and when he hoped to be in a position to give her a home worthy of her beauty and culture. But oh, what a dense tangle and jungle the future is! Into the unknown she had

slipped like a meteor from the midst of its stars. But surely she shall not be forever hidden! Surely for him his morning star will rise, but where, or when, or how? Meanwhile he will build into himself all elements of strength. He will fit himself for that day, for come it must. He must not presume to mix his illiteracy with her culture. Meanwhile the years are passing, and she is swallowed up in the vast unknown like a jewel dropped into the sea.

These were thoughts that harassed and tormented him, at turns encouraging or filling him with despair. The day of this insistent reverie found him strolling in the woods through which lay the open highway. His attention was arrested by a layer of red earth alternating with quartz pebbles and flakes of glistening mica. He picked up a handful of odd stones and sat down to examine them. He was philosophizing over the similarity of the quartz and an arrow-head which he had taken from his pocket, when he heard the patter of hoofs on the hard roadway behind him. He turned in the direction of the sound and saw a lady on horseback approaching. He thought he knew everyone for miles around; but here was a face new and strange to him, and beautiful as strange. She was one of the fairest creatures he had ever looked upon. Her complexion was like the quartz which he held in his hand, but there was a delicate pink in her cheeks which the rose-quartz had not. Her eyes were like flakes of

obsidian and her lips like the wild azalea blossoms. From her jaunty cap a cataract of dark hair was liberated and fell in torrents on her shoulders.

Since parting from Aida on the Red Swan's Neck, Gyp had never seen anyone so beautiful. As she came up to where he sat she reined in her spirited steed and inquired:

"Young man, will you be so kind as to direct me to Lasuda?"

Gyp leaped to his feet, led her to the edge of the woods, and pointing to a gash through the crest of the distant hills, said:

"Y' take th' pass, foller th' road an' it'll bring ye there."

"Then I am all right. I feared that I had lost my way."

"You be right on th' way, good lady."

"Thank you very much. I have been out among these wonderful mountains seeking pupils for my new school at Lasuda, and I feared I had missed my way home. Would you take me for a schoolma'am?" she naïvely inquired.

"I would like to," answered the young man with an expression of countenance which conveyed more to the teacher's mind than Gyp intended. She was amused at the response, but, of course, knew nothing of the deep yearning of the boy's heart that prompted it.

"Would you like to go to school?"

Would he! Was there anything in this world

that he would rather do? Had he not during these past years been doing his best to get rid of "we'ns" and "you'ns" and "his'ns," and the little chips of language which had become so apparent ever since he had met his dear Aida! Now the thought of an education abashed and confused him. He turned the pebbles in his hand, and, with his eyes still upon them, said modestly:

"I have allus wanted to go."

"Where do your parents live?"

"They be both dead."

"Why, that's very sad."

"Paw was killed by the g'rillers and is layin' over yander on the mounting. An' our home was burned an' I 'spec' my maw was in it. But I dunno. I allow she an' paw have found each other afore this."

"My young friend, you have had sore tragedies in your life. Was your father Union?"

"Yessam. There never was but one flag in th' Stybright cabin."

"Oh, you are Gyp Stybright, then?"

"Yes, an' now, too."

"I have heard of you, what a brave young man you are, and have been in the perilous times of war."

Scarcely knowing how to respond to this complimentary allusion to himself, he turned the quartz pebbles over in his hand and hesitated.

"You had great times out on the mountains, years ago," she continued.

"They were ter'ble times; yes, lovely times!" then Gyp looked confused and blushed, while the young equestrienne gave a rollicking laugh which rang among the hills. Gyp looked up into her face wondering why she had laughed, but conscious that he had said something rather ambiguous.

"I have heard that you are interested in an education," she said, repressing her merriment. "I will be delighted to have you for one of my pupils. Can you come?"

"Indeed I can. I'll be powerful glad t' go."

He was so overjoyed that he scarcely knew how to act. Two or three times the pebbles and arrow-head slipped from his hand and were picked up and toyed with in utter aimlessness and confusion. Do we wonder? Had he not there seen the gates of a great opportunity swing open of their own accord? Was not life about to readjust itself agreeably to his fondest dreams? Hope was coming back to him with the brightest garlands on her brow. The young man was, indeed, "powerful glad."

The fair rider turned her horse, gathered up her reins and said to the bewildered boy:

"Do not fail me, Gyp. I will expect you. My name is Miss Larue."

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE FOOT OF THE RAINBOW

GYP watched the retreating figure as she dashed down the road and out of sight. His mind was in a delightful tumult. He was ecstatic over what was in store for him. He threw his pebbles into the ravine and thrusting the arrow-head into his pocket hurried away to communicate the good news.

"But, Gyp, what I gwine do when you be gone?" inquired a tall rawboned, dull-witted fellow-laborer named Jay Hanks, on learning of Gyp's plans for an education. "What I gwine do 'ith no one t' help dig th' taters?"

"Maybe some angel'll come to your help as she come to me," ventured the philosopher of the quartz pebbles by way of possible solution of the difficulty.

"An' mebbby she won't; then what?"

"You'll hafter take your chances. There's al-lus an angel for the feller what's lookin' for her."

"But I'm not a gawkin' erroun' these here mountings huntin' for angels."

"Nuther was I, but she come."

"You believe in angels, do yer?"

"You jes' bet I do. I've seen 'em."

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"More'n one?"

"Yes, I lived in camp with one."

"Camp! Gosh! Angels don't live in camps," snorted Hanks contemptuously.

"Don't they? I saw a angel over the mountings what would make yer mouth water."

"You be daft, boy. Angels is in th' sky an' wear wings."

"Well, I've seen 'em in the woods without wings or feathers; jes' nice white skirts, bright eyes and lovely hair."

"Aw, Gyp; yer foolin'; that's a gal!"

"And cayn't a gal be an angel?"

"Naw; not in these diggin's. Leastwise I never seed 'em."

"Well, you'd better get away f'm home and get idees. There's jes' gobs o' angels runnin' around."

"They don't show up much whar I be."

"That hain't nuthin' ag'in an angel. They goes when they's sent for, or when you's doin' suthin' to fotch 'em."

"What you be a doin' down thar by th' crick when that 'ar angel on hossback cum' t' yer?"

"Med'tatin'."

"'Bout speerits an' things?"

"Naw; jes' thinkin'."

"Well, when a feller's a thinkin' he be a thinkin' 'bout suthin, ben't he?"

"Same's I'm doin' now. Hanks you know I be a goin' over the mounting to the old camp?"

"Why you gwine?"

"See if I can find out any o' the people."

"What fur?"

"Oh, jes' to tell 'em."

"Tell 'em what?"

"My good luck."

Without waiting for further parley Gyp started on his journey, leaving the dumbfounded Hanks watching his retreating figure.

A strange conflict was in the young man's mind as he passed over the roads so familiar to him years before in the days of horrid war. But it was not that that disturbed him. It was the mingling of great hopes which seemed to surge against each other until like combining floods they were lost in each other. He hoped to learn something of Aida Moncure, and be able to let her know of his great good fortune. Then there was the new school at Lasuda, where he would soon be as a pupil; and all the wonderful prospects into which these would lead him. He seemed as if he were treading the celestial mountains.

When he came to the cabin of Col. Moncure there was no evidence of life to be seen. The leaves had drifted about the door, decay had set in and the faces of other days were wanting. The path into the woods was dull as if no foot had trodden it for years. The door was slightly ajar. He pushed it open and stood on the threshold. The place was deserted. There was

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a smell of emptiness, the dank, heavy odor which loves the desolate places. Leaves were wind-drifted in the corners of the rooms. The little mirror that hung on the wall over the washstand was gone, likewise the cot in the corner whereon Aida slept. There were no guns resting in the forked sticks, no hunting garments on the pegs, nor uniforms of warrior days. Nothing in all the place but a memory. He went out to the old camp ground. It, too, was deserted. Then to the "school in the grove." The old bench was there, but worn and rough by storms and sunshine.

He wondered if Aida had left any word for him. Did she dream that he might one day wander back to the old haunts? If so, was there no line anywhere, no memorial to tell him whither she had flown, or if there was love still in her heart for him? He searched the empty rooms, but found only dead leaves and the charred ends of logs in the chimney recess. The one solitary sound that greeted his ears was the noisy tapping of a woodpecker on a dead oak by the old fort. Tears were in his eyes and he came away heavy-hearted, climbed the stone steps in the edge of the cliff and went up to the fort. The door stood open. Here, too, the winds and the winters had been playing pranks. The wistaria had fallen and lay in a heap of brush where weeds had grown and died, and armies of leaves, defeated in the battle with storms, had found their sepulcher.

The mess-room was empty. He walked through the crooked conduit to the kitchen. Ashes, only ashes. He climbed the stone spiral to the third floor. The storage boxes gaped up at him, but held no welcome. The blankets were gone. The guns had disappeared. No memorial of former days remained. He raised a trap and descended to the intermediate floor. Only emptiness was there, and no sound save the echo of his footfall. The embrasures twinkled around the wall, emitting a glimmer of light. The place was more desolate in peace than in war.

Gyp thought of the cave, and ascended to the third loft once more and tried the entrance to the tunnel. The door had been so effectively sealed that its outlines could not be even traced. He went down the stairway to the door on the first floor leading to the underground chamber. He remembered where he had seen Perk Thompson secure the key. Could he expect it to be there still? He would examine. He went to the wall, where he found a stone six inches square had been neatly fitted. After some prying and twisting he succeeded in removing it. He found there an oblong receptacle into which he thrust his arm, but there was nothing. He thought it strange that a secret receptacle should be so carefully planned and have nothing in it; but on second thought he said: "Of course all treasure would be removed." On withdrawing his hand it struck against a loose stone in the interior wall. He

remembered that Thompson had spent quite a little time here, more than he thought necessary in merely depositing a key. The memory of it aroused his suspicion. Maybe there was a pocket within a pocket. With a little effort he succeeded in dislodging the suspicious stone, when back of it he discovered a shelf on which lay a bunch of keys, a half dozen or more, fastened to a ring. The keys were large, of ancient pattern, brass and discolored with age. Thompson had removed the key of the under chamber from the ring to hide the thought that other keys were there, but had carefully replaced it. After several attempts the key was found which unlocked the iron clasp. The door was thrown back and he descended to the gloomy apartment below. The lamp was still in the niche. He touched it with a match, and was gratified to find oil in it. With one of the keys in his hand he opened the door leading to the lower arm of the Y. He passed through into the tunnel, closed the door behind him and slowly made his way to "The Hall of Stalactites," where Snags Groucher had been imprisoned a few days before the announcement of peace. Now that he was here he wondered why he had come. He could not expect to find anyone here. But his heart was weary, and so he wandered aimlessly about and came at last to these chambers where he had often been before and where he and Aida had been very happy exploring the crystalline vaults. He ducked under

the heavy ceiling and strolled about through "The Crystal Grotto," the "Chamber of Columns," the "Queen's Boudoir," and all the glories of this enchanted underworld. But he found nothing, nothing that he sought for, nothing that his heart craved and yearned for, only this magicland, only this fairyland, only this wonderland.

He was returning by "The King's Treasury," when he paused. The chamber was almost closed up. He wondered why this place should be called a treasury. He climbed to the top of rubbish which nearly blocked the entrance, fastened his lamp on the end of a stick which he carried and thrust it into the darkness. There was nothing there but the almost impenetrable gloom, no magnificence of formation, no beauty of wall or of ceiling, none of the glorious sights to be seen elsewhere in the caverns. He thought it all the more strange. "King's Treasury" and no treasures! It was dark as a coal mine. He climbed over the rubbish and entered, hunkering along the floor with his sickly glimmer of a light. His foot struck against a piece of metal. He picked it up and examined it by the smoking light. It was part of an ancient armor. Other pieces were found, a helmet, the broken shaft of a spear, pauldrons, mailed apron and knee pieces. His curiosity was now genuinely aroused. He examined the wall, and by groping about discovered shelves and niches whereon and wherein treasures had no doubt been placed, but had been carried away.

One of the shelves had fallen bringing away with it part of the wall. Holding his lamp close to this fissure he saw a horizontal line. Then he discovered one perpendicular to it. He tore away part of the wall and unearthed a door which had at one time been securely walled up. He tried to open it. It was immovable, solid as the wall itself. He endeavored to insert the broken shaft of the spear under one of the hinges, but failed. Then he thought of the keys. One after another was tried to no purpose. He took up the last one, and the largest of all. It entered the key-hole, but would not turn the lock. He was satisfied he had found the right key. The lock was rusty, no doubt. Again he tried, and again unavailingly. Then an expedient came to him. He took two small pieces of the armor, placed one on either side of the flat, circular head of the key, thus giving himself a larger leverage. He threw his strength upon it. The lock began to grit. It had moved a little. He worked it back and forth, gaining a little each time, till finally the bolt fell back and there was nothing to do but open the door. He took hold of the handle and pulled. It was fast. It would not budge. He ran the spear shaft through the ring in the door, took one end of it in each hand, placed one foot firmly against the wall, pulled with his might, and the door was open.

He thrust his lamp into the vault. There were the treasures of kings! There were pots and

bowls filled with gold—coin and bullion. There were bags of silver on the shelves, and plate of ancient and exquisite workmanship. Gyp was so excited he scarcely knew what to do. The dim flickering of the lamp but poorly revealed the invaluable treasure which he had discovered. Most of the bags were broken with age and the money lay in heaps on the shelves and over the floor. He emptied one shelf after another and piled their contents around him. There were precious stones, sapphires and opals and amethysts, diamonds and topazes, names which he scarcely knew, yet whose rich and resplendent colors blazed upon him in the twilight of the vault. There were cups and flagons and trays, intricate in tracery and orientally wrought. More treasure than he had ever seen or dreamed of. He held the coin to the light. It was gold, he knew, and the coins were large. He could not read the superscriptions nor tell what country they belonged to; yet he knew the pieces were valuable and the amount greater than he could count.

Here was a fortune beyond the dreams of avarice. What would he do with it? He could not tell. It was too great a problem. As it had been safe here for generations, there was now probably no safer place for it. Here he would leave it for the present. He filled his pockets with some of the most valuable coins, replaced the wonderful treasure on the shelves and receptacles of the vault, closed the door and bolted it, returned the

keys to his pocket, left the armor where he had found it on the floor of the cavern, and made his way back to the fort, a new man, new to himself, ready to face his ambitions and master his problems.

Reaching the fort he divided the keys, placed those belonging to the caverns in his pocket and returned the remaining ones to the hole in the wall where he had found them, restored the guardian stone to its place and started for home. He crossed the red highway where he and Aida had met their thrilling experience away back in '65.

"Then," he soliloquized, "I had one treasure, now I have two. One of them is hidden from the world, the other is hidden from me. Heaven help me to bring them together."

He passed on, a new way over the mountain, crossed a bridge which hung above a black and shuddering chasm. Here he left the road and followed a path leading more directly to the summit. He climbed to the crest of one of those flinty sphinxes and for a moment stood gazing into the fathomless spaces where God's great world lay as if in sleep, so still, so tranquil, so voiceless, its great cones pillowed against the blue infinite. Then he turned and followed a circuitous trail. He beheld something ahead of him like a little patch of sky shining among the trees. He first thought it a glimpse of heaven, but as he saw it move, and then disappear he was convinced of his mistake. He crept cautiously from

tree to tree by way of reconnoiter. Then he saw a coil of smoke rise from a cluster of rocks and the patch of sky move out in full view. He straightened up, rubbed his eyes, gazed again more intently. Surely he was mistaken. His eyes seemed to burn a path through the rhododendrons.

"It looks like him," he muttered to himself. "It is his coat. It is his walk! Yes, that's him! That's him." Then he called: "Hello, old Perk Thompson; what ye doin' up here?"

Instantly the "patch of sky" disappeared, and in a moment reappeared with a gun leveled at Gyp, and shouted:

"Throw up yer han's an' stan' thar!"

"Don't shoot, Perk, don't ye know me? I'm Gyp Stybright."

"Hevings an' rattlesnakes, Gyp! Whar'd ye drop f'm?" and Thompson leaned his gun against a tree and hurried to greet his old friend. "I tell yer I cum mighty nigh pepperin' ye with th' old blunderbus."

"Dear old Perk, but I'm glad to see yer!"

"So be I, Gyp, glad t' see ye. How'd ye git here?"

"Been visitin' the old camp ground."

"An' how'd ye know me?"

"Know ye, Perk. I'd know that ar sky-blue suit if I met it in purgatory. Why don't y' get another?"

"This is another; ye didn't suppose I'd be a

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wearin' that 'ar old suit all these years since th' war?"

"Can't ye find a red one, or a green one for a change?"

"Aw, Gyp, me boy; this is my peculiarity. We'ns is knowed by our clothes, same as a sheep is by its wool, same as a rabbit by its track. If it hadn't been fer that 'ar blue suit ye wouldn't a knowed me, Gyp! Ye mightened a hollered and ye might a been layin' down thar in th' ravine no wiser. Y' see peculiarity's a good thing."

"What ye doin' here, Perk? What's that smoke over there?"

"It hain't allus safe fer a feller t' meddle with another feller's smoke; but I know yer, Gyp. Yer wouldn't blow me. Come along. I'll show yer suthin'. I'm runnin' a still; makin' moonshine; gatherin' dew whar dew never fell before. It's like manna f'm heving. Hev a sip?" Perk winked, crooked his finger and led the way to a den among the rocks. Shoving a stone aside he disclosed a hidden box-like opening into which he thrust his arm and drew out a long, black bottle.

"Yer needn't mind, Perk. Licker killed my maw. I thank ye all the same, but I don't be touchin' it."

Perk straightened himself up and stood with the cup in one hand and the bottle in the other, gazing at Gyp in dumb wonderment, trying to grasp the meaning of his speech. Then he

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turned, thrust the bottle back among the rocks, pushed the stone in its place, sat down on a stump and looking Gyp straight in the face, said, disdainfully:

"Yer either a saint er a fool!"

"I'm neither, Perk. I'm just tryin' to be a man."

"Be ye workin' fer th' gov'ment huntin' out stilleries?" and Perk looked very straight at Gyp and with a fire in his eyes which was not good to warm at.

"No, Perk. I been a drivin' the bull-tongue plow since the war, and raisin' taters. I'm goin' to school to-morrow to get an edycation. I told ye the truth. Ye needn't be afeard. Ye can trust me. I never betrayed a friend, and I'm not goin' to begin on you, Perk. Ye mind them days in the camp?"

"Them gov'ment fellers be allus spyin' around fer us moonshiners, an' as yer on yer way home, I'll walk ye a bit along th' trail."

"Perk, where'd the Moncures go after the war?"

"Up North."

"Does ye know what part of the North?"

"I know nothin', Gyp, 'cept they said they was agoin' f'm here t' Knoxville, an' f'm thar to Cin'snati. They was goin' further North, but whar, I dunno."

Gyp's mind was now a whirlpool that sucked in everything about Aida and gave nothing back.

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He only knew, and it was all that he could learn, that the idol of his heart was somewhere in the great Northland. Into that vast dream-country that lay beyond the Ohio she had vanished.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT

WHEN the Civil War closed Snags Groucher went directly on her release from the caverns to Camp Mecune. The olive branch was nothing to her. No white dove circled about her heart. Peace might spread its protecting ægis over the states; she remained bitter as ever. The rebellion in her soul was hotter than before. No proclamation can still the fury of impassioned hate, nor all the batteries of infuriate war drive it away.

Snags found Habor, as she hoped to find him, in his tent. The wound in his breast was unhealed, the bitterness of his feelings rankled deeper than ever, and her presence only caused the current of his wrath to rise to a more turbulent level. They were both furious because the war had terminated before the opportunity came for their revenge. They could not now attribute their hostility to these people to patriotism for the South. Appomattox had declared that there was now no South, no North; no Confederate, no Federal forces. The nation was one again, and any attack made against their former enemies would come under the condemnation of civil law.

To strike down an enemy would be murder. That, however, in no way allayed the fierce fury that burned within them. They would be revenged upon Gyp and Aida, let the consequences be what they may.

In those furious days, before the Confederate camp was dissolved, and while Habor was still a sufferer from his wound, his passion raged like a fire unquenchable.

"That devil-band has dispersed," he stormed, "and here I am, unable to leave my bed, racked with pain while they go off with whole skins. But Gyp shall not escape me. Once my wound is healed I'll track him into the very flames of Tophet."

"If it hadn't a been fer him, ye wouldn't a had t' suffer as yer doin'," the woman responded.

"I've charged this agony all up to him. He will have to pay the debt to the last cent."

"And we'll get it; ay, we'll get it! every last blood-red cent of it!"

"I'm no Shylock," said the wounded man, "but the pound of flesh is mine, and I'll take it nearest the heart. Have the scales ready, Snags!"

"An' think o' poor Terbaccy Tom! my Tom, an' what he suffered off yander on th' oaks."

"Oh, there's many a score to be settled."

"Some of them as ain't dead 'll wish they were. But won't it be murder, Jim?"

"Murder be d——d! They'll have to catch us before they skin us. Our work will be so cun-

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ningly done that the devil himself won't be able to find any evidence against us."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the heartless woman. "The Twin Oaks, the Red Swan's Neck will rise up in jedgment ag'in us all; but who cares. We'll get them! we'll get them!"

"What are we going to do with that doll-face girl?" inquired Habor, with a sudden turn in the conversation.

"Aida?"

"Yes."

"Let her dangle f'm a lim'."

"Oh, no! I have a better fate for her!" and his laugh was that of a fiend. "I'll have my sweet revenge for the bloody gash of her knife."

"There's one apiece for us, Habor! Ha! ha! ha! You take the path of the crimson-cheeked doll and I'll take th' trail o' Gyp. I can follow th' scent o' blood. Oh, I'm a regular blood-hound!" and her laugh was like the crackling of flames among thorns.

"Let me once get over this wound, and the end of the world'll come sooner than I'll give over my purpose."

The nurse, sitting by his side, had listened patiently to the terrible conversation, and at last dared to say:

"But, Mr. Habor, hav'n't these people already suffered quite a good deal at our hands?"

Snags and Habor turned upon her in amazement.

"What d'ye mean?" angrily inquired Snags, who did not welcome any interference.

"Take Gyp, for instance," the nurse continued, scarcely noticing the angry inquiry. "He has lost his father. You know he was hung by our people; and his stepmother, Selma, was consumed, of course unintentionally, in the burning of her cabin, Gyp's home was destroyed and all his possessions, and to-day he is an orphan and an outcast."

"That's a good deal, I'll admit; but it's only part of the pay that's coming to him. He and they got what they deserved."

"If that accursed brat was out o' th' way, you wouldn't have any revengeful memories to cherish, nor would I," added the cruel Snags, her face livid with the memory.

"Besides this is not a public affair any longer; it is an individual matter."

"That's so, Habor, every word of it. He shot you in cold blood, in broad daylight. Ha! ha! It's a comin' to him! It's a comin' to him! Loose the bloodhounds and the vultures."

"But we must not forget," the nurse ventured, addressing Snags, "that Mr. Habor had invaded their camp and had stolen this girl. Had Gyp similarly crept into our camp and stolen one of our sweet young women, would you not have felt that, according to the rules of war, you were justified in shooting him as he fled with the girl in his arms?"

"Sure I'd a shot him. I'd a made his hateful hide look like old granny's sieve."

"Then your logic justifies the shooting of Mr. Habor."

"To the devil with logic," Habor snorted contemptuously. "Such reasoning would upset every plan of getting even. Must I suffer this awful pain and no redress?"

"But you said just now," the nurse continued, "that you would be revenged upon the girl. Surely the girl did nothing but defend herself when she felt that her life was at stake."

"There wasn't the slightest danger to the girl's life. She was perfectly safe. The only danger was through her own foolishness in drawing a knife at that awful hour when I needed all my wit and strategy."

"But you were responsible for the 'awful hour.' If you had not stolen the girl you would not have met your injury. How could she know that no evil was intended?" said the nurse, rather warmly. "She may have thought that your feelings then were the same as you represent them now; and in view of the insinuation just made in regard to your method of vengeance, do you not think she was justified in defending herself?"

"And so I must suffer to gratify an accursed sentiment! Neither logic nor religion can claim the rules of the road when vengeance has the right of way."

"Surely, Mr. Habor, revenge is beneath the

consideration of a great soul; and I am sure, when you have recovered from this abnormal condition you will look at things differently."

"Never! Never! I'll track that girl to the ends of the earth. I will abide my time. Revenge is sweet, and it is coming."

"That's th' stuff, Habor! No goody-goody talk fer us. We'll sleep better in our graves when their souls have paved the way. Gyp fer me; Aida fer you, ha! ha!"

"Then, Mr. Habor," said the nurse, with an expression of indignation on her crimson countenance, "if such is your determination, you will kindly permit me to withdraw from the tent and from further attendance upon you," and the nurse bowed politely and turned to leave. Amazed, Habor said to her:

"Do you intend to leave me in this condition of suffering?"

"I know of no reason why I should use my talent to restore you to health and strength for any such wicked purpose as you have just decided upon. You have Miss Groucher; let her be your helper."

It was along in the afternoon, when Habor was resting more easy, that he said to Snags:

"To what part of the North did Col. Moncure go?"

"I've been trying to find out, but can't."

"No matter," said he turning on his pillow; "there's no city so big that I won't search it; no

mountain so high that I won't climb it; no sea so broad that I won't sail it. I'll drag hell with a muckrake but I'll find her." Then after a twinge of pain, he said: "By the way, Snags, I don't understand that capture of Aida and yourself."

"Nuther do I."

"Do you think the old apple woman had anything to do with it?"

"I don't know. She allus seemed faithful."

"She seemed that way. Of course it would not do to seem any other way. If she had been in the conspiracy that would have spoiled her plan."

"But if she had wanted to help the girl to escape, why wouldn't she have taken her the day you wanted to leave her at her home? Besides, Jim, they captured her the same time they took the girl and me."

"That might all have been arranged to deceive you."

"It might a been."

"It all seems very strange."

"How did they know there was a mine there, Jim, and that she was confined in the blind end of it?"

"That old beast, Snickerby, used to dig coal there. He planned that part, you may be sure."

"My, but I'd like to get my claws on that feller! Ther' wouldn't be much of him left fer old Judy Gans to wink her nose at."

"It's one of the mysteries that I want to see cleared up."

"When you get the girl maybe she'll explain."

"Whether the mystery is solved or not, life for me will have but one mission till I have accomplished my purpose," and as another spasm of pain racked him, Snags soothed his brow and told him he must be quiet.

CHAPTER XXVI

A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS

GYP found in the home of one of his friends an old trunk, covered with the mottled skin of a fawn, with which the moths had taken distressing liberties. Its lock and hinges were large enough for the gates of a fortress, while phalanxes of brass tacks stood guard over and around it. Into this heirloom he packed his few poor belongings, and waited for Old Mose to carry him to Lasuda. As the old negro was long in coming Gyp strolled up the road and sat down on a stump and waited. In the midst of his reveries he heard a voice singing:

“‘Swing low, sweet char-i-ot,
Comin’ for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet char-i-ot,
Comin’ for to carry me home,’”

and presently around a bend in the road Mose came into view in his two-wheeled cart, driving his skinny Bucephalus, bumping over the stones, his elbows on his knees and his rope-reins dangling from his hands, shoeless and hatless, his fuzzy thick hair covering his black dome like snow. He seemed to howl, rather than sing, and

his harsh, discordant notes echoed shrilly through the hills:

"His track I see, and I'll pursue-u-u,
Comin' for to carry me ——"

Woa, Bocef'lus!" she shouted, as he threw his feet against the front of the cart and pulled on the ropes, staring at the figure sitting by the roadside.

"Fo' de Lawd an' de gospill, Gyp, dat you? Whuffer yo' come hyar?"

"Just come out here to wait for ye."

"Ye mos' skert the relig'n all out'n me. You look lak a ghos'."

"Ghosts hain't jes nuffin' at all, Mose."

"Yah! yah! yah!" and Moss tossed his grey thatch in uproarious laughter at the remembrance of his former experience with ghosts. "What a fool niggeh I done mak' o' meself 'bout that ole ha'nted house. You done cuahed me, Gyp, yah! yah! yah! Suah you done cuahed me o' dem fool ghos' noshuns. Come right down hyah, Gyp, and git in dis wagon. We git you trunk, den we's gwine go by Mose's cabin an' see my Dinah. She's de greates' niggeh on de yearth, 'cept Mose, yah! yah!"

'Comin' for to carry me home,'

Nebbeh see dat woman, Gyp? She's a dahlin' pickaninny, an' she done weigh three hundred pounds,

'She's sweet as a peach,
An' she sticks lak a leech,
An' she twines lak a mawnin' glory.'

Yo' done fall in lub wid mah honey-dove, suah,

'Comin' fer to carry me home.'"

Dinah was a great heroine in the eyes of Old Mose, and since her part in the escape of Col. Maxwell she had grown wonderfully in the old negro's estimation. In comparison with her Miriam and Deborah were low down and far away, and the queen of Sheba was a back number. Mose was her twig, and she bent him; her dough, and she kneaded him; her kingdom, and she ruled him. She made him go to church when he wanted to go fishing. She compelled him to give up his fiddle and keep away from the hoe-downs. She told him no man could go to heaven with a fiddle under his arm. Mose shook his head. It was a hard thing to believe, nevertheless he said he'd believe it if "it tuk the las' mite o' sense he had." He yielded, but shook his woolly pate. Mose in heaven, and no fiddle? It didn't seem sensible; but Dinah said so, and Dinah was wise. And the much neglected violin hung on one side of the chimney and the banjo on the other, and Mose sat between them and glowered into the ashes.

"Won't there be any fiddles in heaven, Mose?" Gyp asked.

"I dunno," he ruminated. "Ef dey done got

hawps up dar, what's de matter wid a fiddle? Niggeh no good up dar 'thout fiddle an' bones. He knows nuffin about a hawp," and he continued to shake his thatch. He seemed to be getting very serious, and kept muttering some unintelligible jargon.

"What's the matter, Mose?"

"I'm mad; mad's a rattler."

"At me? I han't done ye no harm."

"It's Dinah!"

"Why, you just said she was the best woman on the earth."

"Lookee heah, Gyp. Dinah's smawt; but she done act de fool. Dinah done got relig'n, and dey be havin' one o' dem niggeh camp meetin's at de meetin' house. An' I be a wo'kin' hawd all day, an' come home tiahd out. W'at yo' think dis hyah niggeh foun' w'en he come to de cabin hawdly able to wa'k?"

"What did ye find?"

"Three niggeh preachers a sittin' dar at mah table wid Dinah, a eatin' mah chuckin, an' she a smilin' lak she dead in lub wid de hull niggeh Conference!"

"And it made ye mad?"

"Mad! W'en de debbil went aroun' roarin foh suffin to dewour, he ben't ha'f as fur'us as I be. Me a wo'kin' hawd wid de sweat on mah brow an' dem niggeh preachers eatin' up mah las' ole shanghai: wouldn't dat raise de bile on de Pos'le Pawl?"

"Of course ye didn't do nothin'."

"Do nuffin, boy! Ye haynt on to de ways o' de married folk. I said to them, 'Git outen hyah, y' low-down, wuffless cannerbals, eatin' up a pore man's chuckin f'm behin' his back.' And I up an' chase 'em outen de cabin."

"Didn't that make Dinah powerful angry?"

"We was boff hot enough to tak' off de grid-dle. We was mos' baked thro'. Dinah she done tuck mah fiddle kase dem wuffless niggeh preachers say a man cayn't get to glory wid a fiddle. And she done feed dat las' ole shanghai rooster to dem same oudashus men. A feller's gotter stan' up foh his relig'n."

"Was that all before you left home to-day?" Gyp asked.

"Bless yer, Gyp, it happen yeahs ago; but w'en it comes ober me it sets me bilin' lak a kittle in sugah-makin' time. Dar be some things it am hawd foh a 'spectable niggeh to fo'get, an' dese hyah chucken eatin' niggeh preachers am one on 'em."

"Then you don't play the fiddle any more, Uncle Mose?"

"Sof'ly dar!" replied Mose, brightening up. "Dinah say a man cayn't keep his relig'n an' his fiddle goin' at de same time. Couse I don' lak to fight lak I uster; so I jes lets dat fiddle hang ag'in de jam. But w'en Dinah goes out washin—Lawdy me, w'at a time dis niggeh do hab wid dat vi'lin."

"But I thought you got religion, Mose?"

Mose studied a moment, then looked down at his black toes and said, ruminatingly:

"I don't think it ketched, Gyp. But relig'n or no relig'n, I don't want no niggeh preachers dewourin' mah poultry. A hones' coon gotter stan' up foh hisself or dey'll eat de ruff off'n de shanty. Yer don't know dem chicken-grabs. Dey didn't leave bones 'nuff o' dat ole rooster to make a huskin' peg."

It was hard for Gyp to become interested in these reminiscences of the loquacious negro. He longed to inquire of Mose what he knew of the Moncures, and to what part of the North they had gone; but the noisy old fellow did not give him a chance to do more than respond indifferently to his chatter. He kept up his cascades of nothings, haw-hawing and yah-yahing, shaking his shock of snowy wool, tittering, gibbering and supposedly entertaining the young man, until he came in sight of his lowly cabin.

"Di-nah! Di-nah!" he called in stentorian tones, when Gyp, looking up saw a mountain of flesh almost filling the doorway.

"Dat's Dinah. She's mah angel," and Mose pushed his thumb in the direction of the door. Gyp saw a great, round, wrinkled face and be-turbaned head; a body plump, chunky as if she had been put together in three spheroidal sections. She was fatness and amiability personified. Her thick, pudgy arms hung out and enclosed her like parentheses.

"Don't I done gone tole ye she's mah angel?" Mose repeated with more emphasis, feeling that Gyp had not been sufficiently enthusiastic over Dinah's charms. Gyp hastened to respond:

"When yer gittin', Mose, there's nothin' like gittin' a plenty."

"Speakin' about them there Moncures, Gyp," Mose said a little later, 'if I wah asked for mah opinyun I'd hafter say they went either Norf or Souf, or somewhar else afteh de wah. Y' see its a long ways to get anywheres f'm hyah. I spec Dinah knows. Dat woman she knows mor'n de queen o' de Shebites. She kin tell yer how de camel got fru de eye o' de needle and backed out ag'in. Dar haint jes nuffin dat dat woman don't know about g'ogafy."

Gyp was fairly beside himself with joy at the rich opportunity that opened before him at Lasuda. His fellowship with Aida had shown him his need of "larnin." If he could only "han'le langwidge" he felt that she would have one reason less for not regarding him favorably. Even in this he congratulated himself that he had made considerable progress since the days of the "school in the grove." Then there was Miss Larue. What a charm she was to him. He had heard about the Queen of Sheba; but he did not know that she had turned school teacher and had come away up to Lasuda. But there she was, sure enough. And *she* was to be his instructor! No wonder the days and the weeks and the years

rolled swiftly away; and never was Mohammedan more devoted to his prayers than was Gyp to his tasks. But in all the school there was nothing quite so attractive as Miss Larue. No smiles were quite like hers, and no words touched his heart like the words of his beautiful teacher. He felt himself drawn irresistibly toward her. She had always a good word in the halls when they met, always a winsome smile when he came to recite his lessons. In the evenings they would sit on the piazza and she would tell him the story of the trees, and when the storms broke over the mountains she would talk to him of air currents, of electrical forces and atmospheric pressure.

On clear nights their talk was of the stars. In the time of their blossoming she told him of the habitat and fellowship of flowers. She explained to him all about the quartz strata which had interested him the day when they first met. She revealed to him the philosophy of common things, and led his inquiring mind beyond the reach of the astronomic lens into spaces where stars grow dim and they need no sun, neither light of the moon to shine there.

And one evening in a burst of confidence, Gyp told his benefactress of his great find in the mountain cave. Together they talked about it, and wondered how it came there. They could not tell; they could but theorize. Miss Larue spoke of the early adventurers along the Atlantic coast and of their battles with the Indians.

She talked of the Spaniards, of the French, of the English, of the lost colony of Roanoke, and of the treasures which the explorers found in possession of the aborigines. She thought of the prisoners carried into captivity, of possible treasure captured with them, and of explorations of which history has said but little, and surmised that these conditions might account for the treasure hidden in the cave. Then Gyp told her what he had resolved to do with it. He would devote this new-found riches to the advancement of his people. He would build institutions of learning; he would establish libraries, he would erect churches that the ignorance and irreligion of his people might be superseded by something better. Thus they would talk in the quiet of the evenings, dream their dream of coming years.

Next to Aida there was no one like Miss Larue. And sometimes as she talked to him, his mind would wander away into the vague and mysterious Northland, there to search through great cities and quiet hamlets for the desire of his heart. Then his mind would return to his fair preceptress, and he wondered how God had ever made two creatures so beautiful, and how gracious it was of him to give them both to him as friends.

But with all the happiness that came to him as he saw the development of his mind and his gradual triumph over those things which once seemed so vague and far away, he had, nevertheless, one thorn in the flesh. It was not Habor

or Snags Groucher, for he knew not yet of their secret plottings against the brightness of his future. It was Sam Crew, a shameless young scapegrace, who had been sowing thorns in Gyp's path ever since he came to Lasuda. He permitted no opportunity to pass without a contemptuous remark or some cruel insinuation about Gyp's father being hung. He was coarse, profane and vulgar of speech, and because Gyp refused to be drawn into any controversy with him it made him all the more tantalizing and offensive.

Gyp had gone to the woods to study the life that he met there and to bring home questions for Miss Larue to answer. Sam came along while Gyp was in a brown study over an orchid which he was examining.

"W'at yer moonin' about, glowerin' there like a stone dog on th' doorstep?" Sam inquired, contemptuously.

Heretofore Gyp had paid no attention to his sneering remarks; but as they were now by themselves in the woods he came to the conclusion that forbearance had its limitations, and he replied:

"The woods are as free for gentlemen as they are for boors and ruffians like you."

"Then I be a ruffian, be I?" and Sam started toward him with a stick.

"Put down that stick, you coward. If you're a man, show it."

"I'll put you down with the stick, ye son of a

catamount," and he raised his arm to strike, but before it fell Gyp leaped upon him and threw him heavily to the ground.

"How do you like that for a stone dog?"

"This is only begun, curse you."

"Ye don't need to curse. Only cowards curse."

"I be a coward, be I? Y' said that once before," and he sprang like a wildcat at his antagonist. Gyp leaped to one side and landed a blow which sent him reeling against a large white-oak tree. Sam was now furious. He stood a moment with his back to the tree glaring at Gyp and using the most frightful oaths.

"If ye would put more strength into your arms and less into yer cussin' ye wouldn't need to lean against a tree for support. Save your wind and come on," came tantalizingly from the lips of his adversary.

Sam needed no second invitation. He came again; this time a little more cautiously. He aimed a terrific blow at Gyp's face, which he parried, and responded to with a blow which sent Sam rolling among the leaves. But he was on his feet in a moment and back at Gyp with the fury of a wild animal. His anger was more violent, but his strength was noticeably weaker.

"Yer losin' yer grip, Sam. Ye've swore about all the oaths you know. Suppose you do a little fightin' for a change."

"There's fer yer taunt!" and Gyp received a blow which dazed him for a moment, and as he

staggered under it, Sam caught him and threw him to the ground. "Now I've got yer!" and he reached for his throat, but Gyp turned him, leaped upon him, and, pressing his arms into the ground, hissed:

"Here you'll stay, Sam Crew, until you promise me two things: that you'll treat me as a gentleman and quit swearing."

"I'll see ye in—"

"No you won't. Ye see me right here; and right here I'm going to stay till ye promise."

"I'll stay here forever, afore I promise."

"Well Sam, it's vacation and I'll stay right with you."

"Let me turn over."

"No, sir. You'll not move one inch until you promise. You've treated me as mean as any man could treat another. Now we're going to have it out. It's going to be settled right here and now."

"Let me up, and we'll fight it out."

"We've fought it out; and if I'm a stone dog, you're the under dog in the fight. You've done all the barkin' at me you're a goin' to."

Sam began to snort and swear; but Gyp placed his hand over his mouth and said: "If I can't stop your swearing one way I will another."

"Play fair, Gyp," Sam protested, as Gyp removed his hand.

"I've played fair. I've stood your taunts now for almost four years and never resented them.

When I threw you a moment ago I gave you a fair chance to come at me again. I might have choked you, as you intended to do to me. More than that I might have given you such a beating as you would not forget as long as you live. But I've spared ye. I've played fair, Sam, and you'll promise me or here you'll stay all night with your back on the moss and Gyp Stybright roostin' on your stomach. Do just as you've a mind to; I'm in no hurry." And he nonchalantly took a cracker from his pocket and began eating.

"Darn ye."

" 'Tain't wuth while, Sam."

"Lemme up."

"Then promise."

"I'll not promise."

"Then you're in for it."

"I'll holler fer help."

"The moment you holler I'll jam a handful of moss into your mouth. No, Sam, you'll do no hollerin'."

"Lemme up, will yer, ye're hurtin' me stummick."

Gyp took another cracker from his pocket and craunched away in silence, paying no heed to Sam's demand.

"Get off'n me stummick, I tell ye!"

"I'll get off when ye promise. Till then I stick."

"But ye'r hurtin' me."

"It'll quit hurtin' when I get off, and I'll get off when ye promise."

"Be ye goin' t' sit ther' forever?"

"Dunno, Sam, it's up to you."

"Well, I'll promise to treat ye right if ye'll get off."

"Thank ye, Sam; now ye're half through."

"Then ease up a little."

"Not till you promise to quit swearin'."

"It's none o' yer business whether I swear or not. If I treat yer right, that's all yer oughter ast of a feller."

"It's wicked t' swear; and you've hurt Miss Larue's feelin's and the feelin's of lots of the boys and girls. You've been a nuisance with your bad language; and here I sit till ye give your word and honor that ye'll quit forever."

"Suppose I promise an' then break over?"

"Then you make yourself a liar."

"D'ye call me a liar?"

"No, Sam. I said that if you broke your promise you'd make yourself one. And it's up to you to say whether you'll break over or not."

"Well, if ye're not a goin' to git off'n my stummick till I promise, here goes."

"Then you've quit, good and for all?"

"Yes."

"And you won't take it back when you get up?"

"No. Oh, Gyp! git off'n me stummick."

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“All right, Sam, and here’s my hand. Now let us be friends.”

“Well, d—”

“Sam!”

“I promise. Here’s me claw.”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DIVERTED JOURNEY

WHEN Col. Moncure and his daughter left the North Carolina mountains at the close of the war their purpose was to go directly North and visit the scenes of the Colonel's boyhood. But after they had bidden farewell to the friends of their camp life, and had started on their way, Aida expressed a strong desire to see their southern home once more. This necessitated a change in their plans, and, unknown to their friends, they turned their faces southward. It was a sad home-going for them both. They found Ichabod written everywhere. They saw only windowless walls where they had left a beautiful mansion. Partitions of rooms had fallen and lay in heaps of rubbish. The parlor, once the scene of luxury and delight, was but a melancholy pit, filled with the débris of partitions and fallen floors. The ragged remnants of foundations spoke only of desolation. Wild vines clambered over the ruins in a vain endeavor to hide their spoliation from the gaze of their former masters. After sorrowfully viewing the waste and wreck of their once lovely home they went over to the graves in the garden. It was like going through the field of

the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. "It was all grown over with thorns and the face thereof was covered with nettles." The stone wall was broken down—carted away to make defenses against the northern arms. The beautiful flowers had vanished and the precious mounds which marked the resting places of their beloved dead, had disappeared—rooted up by vandal swine or tramped by predatory cattle into the earth. If Moncure and Aida wept when they said farewell to this sacred place, they had more reason for weeping now. With heavy hearts and unrestrained tears they turned to the weather-worn cabin of one of their former servants, old Mammy Rachel. To their delight they found it occupied and the door standing open. The wrinkled and lame old negro turned her face toward them as they entered, and called:

"Who dat at de doo', stannin' dar in de light?"

"Don't you know me, mammy? Take a good look," Moncure answered.

"Ah don't know yer; yo' face all dim in de shadder."

"Then maybe you will know this young lady?" and he laid his hand upon Aida's shoulder.

"Mammy's eyes mos' gone. De yearth an' de sky mos' bof shet out. De light am dim an' I cayn't rec'nize ye. Tell me who yo' be, an' who be de gyrl?"

"God bless you, Rachel; I did not think you

would ever forget Colonel Moncure and Aida, the little girl whom you nursed when a baby."

"Yes, mammy, dear old soul, I'm Aida; but you see I'm quite a young lady."

"De lan' o' goodness: de Lawd be prais'd!" and she tottered over, leaning on the top of her staff, and threw her arms about Aida in an ecstasy of welcome. "De good Lawd bress ye, Aida! Ah nebbeh 'spected to see yo' ag'in. De Lawd open mah pore ole eyes to see yo' bressed face once moah. Bress de Lawd, oh mah soul, an' fo'get not all his bennyfits!"

"We're awfully glad to see you, too, you dear old faithful mammy," the young lady responded.

"We've thought of you so often during these awful years. Wasn't it good of the Lord to spare us when so many brave ones have fallen since we last saw each other?"

"Oh, chile! chile! de wah was not foh sweet young eyes lak yoahs. Dead men an' coffins; coffins an' dead men. Fightin' an' fiah, fiah an' fightin'; but, praise de Lawd it's all obeh now, and Ah seed ye bof befo' Ah gone died. Now, Lawd, let thy suvvant depawt in peace. De bloody wah am obeh, but mah boys am gone! Sambo an' Pete an' Andy—all gone! Mammy lef' alone, honey, all erlone. Only yo' come back. Mebby de boys drap in some day befo' Ah go. But mammy hain't got long to wait. Ah'm jes' a sittin' hyah in de shadders waitin' fo' de Lawd to come. Oh, mah boys! mah boys!" and the

tears rolled down her cheeks, but whether at the sorrow of parting with them, or at the joy of the hoped-for reunion, Moncure did not inquire. He said, softly:

"The Lord comfort and support you for the boys you have given up for the old flag."

"He done gone been good to me. De Lawd been wid me mawnin', noon an' night. Oh, Ah been in Beulah lan' suah! De shinin' ones come an' jes' fill mah hawt an' fill dish ole cabin wid glory. Dem boys all Linkum sojers, an' Ah's gwine see 'em ag'in. Ah's waitin', Ah's waitin'! Praise de Lawd; he's comin', yes, he's a comin' soon, an' mammy won't hab long to wait twell she see huh boys ag'in. Rachel been a mownin' foh huh chilluns; but, Kunnel, Ah's gwine see 'em an' de Lawd gwine wipe away all teahs f'm mah eyes."

"Yes, Rachel, we'll meet our dear ones again; so don't cry! Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. Till then, poor troubled heart, may the 'shining ones' be with you."

"Nebbeh feah; they'll be wid me, Kunnel. Dey's been right hyah in dish cabin when de stahs shine an' when de sunbeams come in at de doo'."

"Now, mammy, if you'll excuse me for a little while, I'd like to look after a little business. I will leave Aida with you till I return, which will be soon."

When her father had gone out, Aida looked up into the tear-stained face, and said:

"Dear papa is concerned about mamma's grave and the grave of my little brother. They are in a shameful condition."

"Come sit on mah knees, honey, 'till mammy talk wid yer," Rachel replied, drying her tears on her apron, and endeavoring to forget her sorrow. "De graves all gwine be open some day, honey; an' yo' own deah mammy won't be in de gyarden no moah. We's all gwine home. But, Lawdy, chile, how yo's grow'd, an' how yo' look lak yo' deah mammy gone to de glory lan' long ago. Ah, chile, suah Ah tho't yo' nebbeh gwine come back to me no moah; but heah yo' be. An' Ah praise Him fo' it."

"I wanted to come back to see you and see our once beautiful home; but it's all gone. I suppose I ought not to murmur, when your loss has been so much greater than ours. I have dear papa left. Rachel, you know we had so many nice pictures on the walls when we left, and mamma had collected so many rare and curious things in her travels. Do you know if they were all burned?"

"Bress ye, honey, ebberything went. Yo' nice books an' picters an' cawpets, dishes an' cuhtains. De fiah sweep clean, sweet chile. Mah little Aidah's room an' all its nice things, an' de Kunnel's papers. Nuffin lef' 'cept jes' walls an' ashes an' sorrow."

"Isn't war an awful thing? Why do men want to do such wicked things?"

"It's Satan, chile. It's de debbil. But soon as men git de Lawd in dar hawts de swords gwine be beat into plowpints an' de speahs into grubbin' hooks."

"Well, I wish I could see the factories started now. I'd help gather up the swords and the spears."

"An' old mammy he'p yo' fro' 'em into de meltin' pot, an' mould de plowpints."

"Say, mammy, I've got something good to tell you."

"What yo' gwine tell me, honey?"

"I've got a beau!"

"Yo chile! W'y bress yo' hawt, honey, it hain't hawdly yisterday sence Ah fed ye on a bottle!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" and Aida's merry laugh rang through the cabin. "But, mammy, see what a young lady I am now. Don't you think I'm old enough for someone to love me?"

"De whole wo'd been a lovin' ye, chile, ebbeh sence yo' was bohn; but yo' seem to me jes' lak a li'l baby cryin' obeh yo' fust teeth."

"Were you ever in love, mammy?"

"Me? Ah fell in lub wid Jake when Ah no mo'n fo'teen."

"In love at fourteen? Oh, mammy, you were worse than I. Where was your mother's bottle at that time?"

"Go long, chile. Ye's makin' spo't o' yo' ole mammy."

The conversation was interrupted by the return of the Colonel. They then bade their old household servant good bye and turned away from the cabin and the old home, home no more, and made their way farther south through fields made desolate by the war, down to New Orleans. Here they waited for some days for a steamer for St. Augustine, and from there they made their way northward, and then across the ocean to Spain. The Colonel felt a yearning to see again many of the scenes which he and his dear wife had visited years ago, and here, and in other eastern lands, he and his interesting daughter gave themselves up to travel and study.

If they had sought to escape from the wrath of Habor they could not have hidden their trail more successfully, nor have lost themselves so completely in this vast, tangled wilderness of a world. But they knew nothing of the vengeance that was nursing itself into a frenzy away back in Camp Mecune.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AHITHOPHEL FALLS SHORT ON HIS COUNSEL

SCHOOL days at Lasuda were over, and as Gyp was about to descend the piazza steps he turned to wave a last farewell to teachers and schoolmates. Miss Larue, his ever faithful friend, placed a snow-white missive in his hand and, closing his fingers over it, whispered:

"Do not open till you reach home."

"Thank you, very much. Good bye, Miss Larue."

At the foot of the steps he met Sam Crew. Sam was very much of a changed man since the day when he and Gyp fought their differences to a finish in the woods. He had learned to treat all his schoolmates with respect and even cordiality. He had quit swearing, and was trying to live as a gentleman should. The school wondered at the change, but knew not the reason of it. And now as the boys were about to separate, Gyp extended his hand with the remark:

"Good bye, Sam. Hope lots of good things will come your way."

"I'm not ready to say good bye. I'm going along with you a short distance."

"Glad to have you, Sam."

"W'at you goin' to do now that you are through?" Sam inquired after a long tramp over the hills, when they had sat down on a spur overlooking a splendid reach of mountain, plain and winding stream.

Gyp hesitated. He looked off to where a few houses flecked the far-away landscape, like sheep that were newly shown, and replied, confidentially:

"Sam, you've kept your word with me. I've trusted you, and I believe you have done the same with me. I'm going to tell you something that I never told anyone. I've got the sweetest little girl on earth."

"You, a girl?"

"That's just what I have."

"Miss Larue?"

"No, not Miss Larue; but you bet she is the best woman I ever saw—except one."

"Who's the one, Gyp; out with it?"

"Oh, you don't know her. Don't live in these diggin's."

"Then where?"

"I wish I knew."

"Aw, Gyp; come off your perch. Don't pretend you're trustin' me when you're tellin' me nothing."

"Honest, Sam. I don't know where she is, and I would give anything if I did."

"Run away and left you with cold feet?"

"Not that; but she's gone."

"Well, then, I'd let her run. Girls that run away from fellers ain't worth worryin' over. Let her go, Gyp."

"The counsel of Ahithophel is not good at this time."

"And who's Ahithophel? Her daddy?"

"Oh, some old Jew fellow."

"You seem to hanker after the girl, don't you?"

"Now you're getting warm, Sam. That's the exact truth. But it isn't all the truth."

"Then give us the rest of it, and that Ahithophel Jew feller may change his mind."

"It's about this way, Sam. In war times Aida—that's her name—and I were for some months in the mountain camp. Just as the war came to an end my uncle died, leaving me his heir. I was obliged by certain conditions of the will to remain on the farm for a length of time. Of course the camp broke up and I saw her no more."

"And she didn't leave you no word?"

"Not a word."

"Nor write you a letter nor nothin'?"

"Nothing since that day."

"Well, how in Sam Hill are you going to get her when you don't know where she is?"

"That's the thing that's bothering me."

"Friends know nothing?"

"Not a thing except what old Perk Thompson told me."

"What's 'Old Sky Blue' know about it?"

"Perk was one of our band; and he said that when they broke camp Aida Moncure and her father went North."

"What part of the North?"

"Perk couldn't tell."

"North's a big country."

"But a mighty poor country for a pretty girl like Aida to hide in."

"How's that?"

"Sam, you can't keep a girl as lovely as she is hid. All the people in the town'll know her. Oh, you just go into any town, New York, for instance, ask: 'Where's that girl with the heavenly eyes, cheeks like the sunset, voice as if all the angels had pooled their sweetness and made her a present of it'; and if she's in that town, every young man'll jump to his feet and say, 'I know: come with me; I'll show you where she lives.'"

"Yes, and maybe find her some other fellow's wife, with lots of little baby togs in the laundry."

"Sam, shame on you. Got no poetry in your soul? No, sir; I won't believe it. She's waiting for me somewhere."

"And how are you going to find out?"

"I'm going to search the cities till I find her. You asked me a moment ago what I was going to do now. My business is to find that girl."

"Gyp, it's folly."

"If you knew her you wouldn't think so."

Solomon would give all his glory for a girl like Aida. Yes, and swap his harem, too, for one good look. Sam, you just come around in a few years and you'll find me the happiest man on the top of this footstool."

"Well, Gyp, good bye. Get her if you can. I wish you good luck."

"I can, and I will. If the earth holds her, I'll find her."

"That's the way to talk it," and he arose and took his schoolmate by the hand. "Good bye; I must go. You've made a man of me, and I want to tell you so before we part. But I guess I'm the first fellow that was ever reformed by another fellow sitting on his stomach. So long, old boy."

"So long, Sam."

CHAPTER XXIX

SNAGS GROUCHER REDIVIVUS

GYP walked over the thin upper edge of the peak and came to Sunset Rock. Two thousand feet below him swept a narrow valley, where, at the foot of the chasm, the tall pines and sinewy oaks looked like seaweed. A narrow ribbon of water crept sinuously out of sight, its shores fringed with masses of reeds like tufts of moss, so very far away they were. Gyp feasted his soul upon the scene. Around him were the wood-anemone and the passion flower, the yellow orchid and the fire-pink. Far below him a venturesome vulture spread its dark wings and soared off into the infinite. Round and round on level pinions it floated, with this graceful river of silver more than a thousand feet beneath it. As Gyp sat drinking in the sublimity of the scene, he was startled by a scream which rent the air as with a knife blade. He jumped to his feet and turned in the direction from which the sound came. But there was nothing to be seen. He listened, but there was only the silence of the everlasting hills.

He turned again to the vision before him, so vast, so restful; unbroken by crag or cliff or

populous city, unscarred by iron rail or mast of vessel. It was nature at rest. The aspiring mountain masses overreached each other in their eagerness to touch the sapphire fringes on the garments of God. Then came that awful scream once more, as inharmonious with the scene as the devil's entry into paradise. The cry seemed nearer than before and chilled the blood in his veins. He went down the road a short distance to a clump of foliage; but found nothing to reward his search. He was familiar with the cry of the catamount; but this was another cry. It was the voice of a human being, but where it came from he could not tell. He called, but there was no response. Then he turned back to the Rock once more. It was a glorious sight to fall in with, and it seemed as if his soul was held there. He thought of the might of Him whose "strength setteth fast the mountains." That morning he had heard Miss Larue quote: "The strength of the hills is His," and he felt sure that he knew now something of its meaning. Away beyond the little, tin-foil river he saw red patches of earth lying like foxes' skins on the ground, and on one of these patches a cabin home sat squat, like Milton's toad, but the sons of toil who wrought in the umber earth were invisible to the naked eye. The strange color of the earth recalled to mind his experience on the Red Swan's Neck years ago, and his thoughts were away on impossible explorations, when that wild voice

again broke the glorious stillness. This time it seemed very near to him, and sang in rasping tones:

Toads and bats for the adder's den;
 Rue and dew for the poison fen;
 Hell for the souls of bloody men;
 Blood-y men, blood-y men,
 Hell for the souls of blood-y men.

The words were rasped in a fearful monotone, which was punctuated by that unearthly scream which Gyp had already heard thrice.

Turning in the direction of the sound he saw, coming up the path, a gaunt, witch-like creature, bent half over, leaning heavily on the top of her staff. Her hands shook as if with the palsy, making her staff tremble as she leaned upon it. She was clad in a black robe, girt about the waist with a red sash whose ends hung almost to her feet. A blue sun-bonnet fell back on her shoulders, bringing her sharp, angular features into outline. Her hair hung loosely on either side and was pushed behind her large florid ears. As the winds dallied with it, it was tossed in drifts across her face or over her shoulders. She walked slowly, looking from side to side, shaking her cane with her palsied hands and keeping step to that gruesome song:

Toads and bats for the adder's den.

Gyp took a step backward, gazed intently upon her for a moment, and shuddered:

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"Snags Groucher, or I'm a ghost! And if it is, I may soon be one!" There he stood transfixed, his startled eyes riveted upon her. "Crazy, crazy! wandering through the mountains a maniac and a terror," he said in a whisper, not daring to utter the words aloud.

She came on, humming that awful monologue:

Blood-y men, blood-y men;
Hell and hate—

She looked up suddenly and stopped. She saw Gyp standing on that frightful precipice gazing directly upon her. Her eyes snapped and burned, and seemed to penetrate him like X-rays. She jammed her staff down hard upon the earth, and shook it back and forth as she rasped:

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h!"
She stamped her foot and shrieked:

"Blood-y men, blood-y men;
Hell's the place for the blood-y men."

Her burning eyes were upon him; yet he never flinched from that awful gaze. He knew that she was insane, and that he stood face to face with a wild animal. For him there was no escape except directly past her. She had him at bay on that frightful crag. He started toward her, thinking to get away as soon as possible from that imminent peril. She gave a little hop toward him and uttered that blood-curdling:

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h!"

Evidently she had not recognized him; and it was not strange that she did not, for this fine-looking, well-dressed man was very different from the knee-breeched, bare-foot lad she had seen years ago. In that lack of recognition Gyp felt that his hope now lay.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he inquired sympathetically.

She blinked on him a moment with her search-light eyes; then walked away a few paces; turned about and confronted him again, and, extending her sharp nose and chin, she hissed:

"Toads and bats for the adder's den;
Rue and dew for the poison fen—"

"Man!" she shrieked, "Man, they're agoin' to roast! They're agoin' to roast, down under the rocks an' the stones an' the graves an' the rotten places where the dead be!"

"Who are going to roast?" Gyp ventured, his blood running cold at the awful horror of her declaration.

"The men who be keepin' up this war."

"What war?"

"Ah-h-h-h-h! What war? Ah-h-h-h-h! Out yander on the Jim River. Out yander on Mish'nary Ridge. Ah-h-h-h-h! An' I'll see the bonfire in hell, an' I'll hear 'em crackle! My! My! My!" and she thrust her long, skinny fingers into her tangled hair and shrieked:

"O the war! the war! Blood, blood is on the soul of things!"

"There is no war," Gyp sympathized. "There is no fighting now on the Potomac or along the James River. The boys are home now."

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" She jabbed her staff into the ground and gave two or three little hops into the air. Her whole body swayed back and forth as she hissed through her teeth: "The fight-in' hain't over, damn 'im, it hain't agoin' to be over. It's a lie. The boys hain't home. They're in the earth, and in the sea, and under rocks and wrecks and bleachin' out yander on the mountings. They're roastin' in fire and a freezin' in ice, and the birds is peckin' them in the woods. Me and Ginerall Jackson can lick the hull North and tear 'em in twain lim' f'm lim'. D'y hear me: tear 'em in twain."

"No doubt about it," Gyp assented. He felt it was the safest thing to do.

"Say, I'm huntin' a man!"

"A man? There are plenty of them in the mountains."

"Ah-h-h-h-h! Mighty few wuth skinnin'. I'm after a man, a little bare-foot man. These hands'll claw him, and rend him, and tear him, and pull him lim' f'm lim'."

"You're not much in love with the man you are seeking."

"Love! love! Tha hain't no love in hell, and that's where I be. Have YOU seen him?" and

she fixed her ghastly-red eyes on Gyp and thrust her skinny forefinger almost into his face.

"I don't know whom you mean."

"His name's Gyp. Gyp Stybright, curse him: little, wooly-headed curse, bare head, bare feet, so high," indicating with her hand. "He's the man. Oh, I'll get 'im. I'll give him to the eagles, the tumble-bugs and the spotted snakes."

A chill ran over the young man. He looked into her eyes which seemed to burn in their sockets, fed by an inextinguishable hate. Gyp had never seen a look so satanic or one so terrible mantle the face of a human being.

"Where are you going to seek him?" he inquired, endeavoring to keep up a desultory conversation, at the same time trying to work his way backward from the precipice.

"Over the earth; into the sea; up into heaven; down into hell. I'll rake the cinders till I find him; rake 'em; rake 'em till I turn up his little scorched soul in the ashes," and with her skeleton finger she stooped down and clawed the grass, pulling it out by the roots and separating the blades. Then she flung it away. "Ah-h-h-h-h! He's not there. Say, man! look here," and she raised a flap on the skirt of her dress, took out a pistol and handed it to him. "See that? That's for Gyp. Its full. Smell it. Smells good, don't it? Smells bloody. Fire it off."

This gave Gyp his opportunity. He stepped a few paces beyond her, bringing the crazy crea-

ture between him and the yawning abyss. He then turned his face toward the canyon, held out his hand and fired.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, as the reverberation resounded among the hills. "See him writhe! there in the dust! Writhe, ha! look at the blood. You've killed him. Ha! ha! ha!" and her laugh was that of a fiend. "See here, man," and she took from the pocket in her skirt a leather sheath, old and worn, and drew from it a savage looking dagger, replaced the sheath in her pocket and held up the rusty blade before him.

"Lovely, isn't it? That's for Gyp," and she turned the point toward him and looked along its edge straight into his face. "Here, see this," and she pointed to some dark spots on the blade. "It looks like rust; but the dagger lies. It's blood. D'ye know whose blood that is? Answer me."

"I certainly do not."

"That's the blood of Selma Stybright, this spot, right here; see that mark? That's where I stabbed her afore I burned the house over her. The blood came up that far. It went in just so deep. See that black line there, there where I'm a pointin'? That's where I stabbed Gyp's daddy after we'd hung him to the oaks. And right here," and she touched the point of the accursed steel, "right here will drip the blood of that little brat, Gyp, when I get 'im!"

The young man was horrified at the awful

revelation of that inhuman, demon-haunted creature. He believed every word of her fearful story, and his blood boiled in his veins. His face grew ashen as she continued her harsh and brutal narrative. His nerves tingled so that he could scarcely restrain himself. His first impulse was to fling her over the rock and give her flesh to the beasts of the field and to the fowls of the air. Here was a chance to avenge the cruel murder of his parents, by hurling her down into that roaring abyss. But he saw that the vengeance of God was already upon her. She was no longer responsible. The Judge of all the earth was already dealing with her. Heaven had anticipated him. If there was a hell in this world she was in it, a torment to herself and a terror to her fellow-beings, without God and without hope in the world.

"I will leave her in His hands," he said, and he handed back the blood-stained blade, rusted with the life's blood of his father and mother.

"Oh, I'll git 'im yet. He's over yander kickin' where you shot him. I smell the blood of him here," and she lifted the dagger to her nostrils. "It'll drip right there, Gyp's blood will. Oh, I'll git 'im and Habor'll get the wench."

"Habor! Habor!" he shouted, amazed. "Who is Habor, and whom is he trying to get?"

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" she rasped, and pointed toward the sharp peak to her right, and raised her harsh, discordant voice almost to a scream: "The Red

Swan's Neck; the flying horse; Habor; Aida; he's on her trail; he'll find her; ha! ha! ha! Man, he'll get her!"

The horror of such a possibility almost unmanned the young mountaineer. The thought that Habor was alive and on the trail of one he loved had never dawned upon him. Now the thought of it filled his whole being with a feeling of unutterable horror and dismay. His Aida; his darling! and he knew not where to find her or how to help her. What could he do? Where could he go?

"Where is Moncure? and where are Habor and this girl you speak of?" he seemed to demand, rather than ask.

"Ha! ha! ha!" Her laugh was demoniacal, and her fiendish, imp-like countenance glowed with a light that might have flashed from some inner Gehenna. That was all. She stared into his ashen face, but made no further answer.

"Where did Habor go in his search? Tell me!" he thundered.

Her red eyes still burned into his face. Her fingers clutched nervously as if she was about to leap upon him and rend him to pieces. He thrust his hand into his pocket where he had placed the pistol a few moments ago and closed his hand tightly upon it. The maniac stamped her feet and jabbed her staff into the ground, gnashed her teeth together and hissed, as she shot out her bony index finger:

"Where do the spirits of weasels go, and tom-cats when the bull dogs kill 'em? What becomes of the souls of bats and snails, red lizards and black roaches?"

"Tell me," he interrupted, "where is Habor and where is Aida Moncure? Don't ask me such infernal things. Where are those people: answer me!"

"Call up the ghosts of dead toads and ask them; ask the soul of the blue jay which the hawk has eaten. Ha! ha! ha! Yer wants to know where Habor, my lover, has gone? Let the wild goose that flies down from the north lakes answer. I've sent him abroad for another lover!" She walked away a few paces; glanced back over her shoulder at him and returned. "Look at my hands!" and she thrust them toward him. They were filthy, withered and her long nails curved up like an eagle's claws.

"Man, what do you see there? They're red, red here on the palm and here on the back, red, red. It's blood, man; it's blood! Here rests the blood of the men and women I've killed. I love the smell of the blood. I've burned them in their houses, and drowned them in the river; and hanged them to the trees; and shot them through the doors and winders in their homes. Ha! ha! ha!"

It was a hard thing for Gyp to say, when he knew that this terrible creature had helped to murder his own father and mother, yet suppress-

ing the natural enmity which arises unbidden, he said:

"We must forgive and forget."

"Forget! Forgive! Who can forgive sins but God only," she shrieked, and her voice reverberated among the mountains. She glared at him a moment, turned about and deliberately walked away. She passed up the trail, a black tottering crescent bending over the top of her staff, wailing that fierce, imprecatory strain:

"Toads and bats for the adder's den;
Rue and dew for the poison fen;
Hell for the souls of blood-y men."

CHAPTER XXX

GYP SEEKS AN OLD FRIEND

GYP hurried from that awful place. It had given him a glimpse of the paradise of God, yet a paradise through which there passed the shrieking ruin of Snags Groucher like a wraith flung up from the world of lost souls. A short walk brought him to the top of the hill above the Falls of Okaluna. He saw not yet the cataract; but he saw a sweet little stream that babbled and simpered on its way down to the cliff. He leaped across it and followed the stream to the Falls, where, white with rage, it flung itself from the cliff's edge down upon slippery shelves, hurried around great boulders and flinging defiance in the face of branch and root and every lithological obstruction, sprang sheer from the precipice and fell in beads of chrysolite far down amid unfriendly rocks.

The sweep of the stream and the plunge of the waterfall brought back to young Stybright's mind the memories of years ago. It was at this very spot that he lay asleep when his mother sought him so bravely through that distant, perilous night. Here is where she fell, lantern in hand, and set fire to the leaves and mountain

side, and started that memorable conflagration. Beneath the escarpment of rock on which he stood he and his mother had crept for protection from the awful fire. There were still standing many of the trees scorched and blasted by the fierce heat.

What changes since that night!

Oh, what memories had this day brought to him!

But he must not wait. He must find his loved and long lost Aida, and rescue her from any possible danger from the relentless Habor. He crept cautiously down the mountain cliff, picking his way over rocks that were wet with spray and slippery with dead leaves and mosses, throwing his arms about the trunks of young trees for support, making stairs by striking his heels into the soft earth, clinging to roots that jutted from the rocky slope, zigzagging here and there until at last he reached the hard, pebbly road along which he and Old Mose had passed years ago on their way to Lasuda. He crossed the roadway and disappeared in the dense woods. He thought of the treasure-cave near the old camp ground and of the riches that there awaited him. He thought of the splendid fortune which he would bring to his beloved Aida, rare and costly stones, wonderful jewels, gold and silver, traced in all the cunning of ancient craftsmen. He thought of the good which he would be enabled to do with his riches for all these mountain people. But

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the valley was already chill with the dews and damps of gathering night as he emerged from the forest and entered a little clearing. Beyond it, among the trees, he saw a glimmer of light. It was the cabin of an old acquaintance. He approached it and rapped on the door. He was answered by the growl and yelp of a cur within.

"Shet up!" came a coarse voice, and the door was pulled open. Gyp knew not the strange face that confronted him.

"Is my old friend, Ard Stammel, in?" the wayfarer inquired.

"Ard Stammel? Yes, 'e be in—in th' tuther world. Ard 'e be dead an' gone a right smart spell. Ef ye digs deep enuff ye'll fin' his bones out yander beyent th' steer shed."

"Oh, I am very sorry. I had not heard of his death." Gyp then remembered that he had not seen Ard since the war. Before that time he used to play with his children about the door and meet them on the mountain paths.

"Can I see any of his children?" he interrogated.

"I reckon ye kin ef ye go whar tha be."

"Then his family does not live here?"

"Bless ye, no; I been a livin' hyar years an' years."

"What's your name?"

"Lon Kluney; an' what be you'n?"

"Gyp Stybright."

"Never heered o' ye. Come in."

Gyp entered because he was weary and hungry, rather than from any cordiality in the tone of the invitation, or of welcome in the strange, staring faces that glared into his as he entered.

"Tak' a cheer," and a backless tripod was shoved toward him.

A sorry medley of humanity was about him. There were fully a dozen men, women and children, with not a pair of shoes among them, poorly clad, with poverty written on every countenance. Two families were housed in this one small room, like as many swine. They all seemed to be using tobacco in some form, except the very little children. Some were smoking, some were chewing, and some with their snuff-sticks were rubbing their filthy gums. Cleanliness was a lost art, and decency had gone to keep it company.

"Hev a sip o' dew?" hospitably inquired Kluney, as he took from the mantel a large bottle filled with almost transparent whiskey, and handed it toward his guest.

"Thank you, I never drink."

"Not drink mounting dew? Humph!" grunted Kluney, replacing the bottle on the shelf with a manifest feeling of irritation that his hospitality had been rejected by this stranger. "Then yer don't hafter," with another disapproving grunt.

"Mountain dew once turned into a frost and killed my mother," Gyp quietly responded, "and before she died I promised her that I would never

touch it, and thus far I have kept my word. I'm not thirsty; but I am hungry, and if you will offer me a piece of pone I will accept it with thanks in place of the drink you so kindly tendered me."

"M'riar, pone; give th' stranger pone," called Kluney to a bronzed woman whose stolid face seemed already to have turned into an interrogation point.

Mariah, a brawny woman, with great blue veins traversing her bared arms, opened a corner cupboard, took out a slab of corn bread and with a broad, sword-like knife, cut off a slice large enough to supply the wants of two hungry men.

"Oh, Mrs. Kluney, the one-fourth of that!"

But with a sniff that her hospitality should be quartered, that generous dame handed him the entire amount without saying a word.

"And so Ard Stammel is dead?" Gyp ventured, interrogatively, desiring to open up some line of conversation. "Can you tell me the cause of his death?"

"Ard had tribble 'ith his neck an' it tuk him off'n his feet," Kluney responded as stolid and impassive as a gargoyle.

"I see, I see," said Gyp meditatively. "He was hanged for being a Union man."

"Eggsackly."

"Tell me about it."

"He was tuk by th' Greys an' 'e had a Yankee flag; an' that was th' evydence ag'n 'im."

"And they hanged him?"

"Th' Greys said as how tha thought 'e mought be more account in heaven than in these North C'liny mountings, an' so tha sent 'im through by th' rope route."

"What became of his family?"

"Well, 'is widdy wer kind o' upset th' turn things tuk, an' she sol' off 'er stawk an' taters, 'er craps an sich 'thout gettin' much, an' tuk her chilluns an' got away f'm hyah."

"Where are they living now?"

"Dunno. Never been heern o' sense."

"Have any friends?"

"Unioners help her, I guess. She war mighty sot on th' ol' flag, an' I jedge she war looked atter. An' I hain't noways a 'gredgin' 'er."

"It all seems very sad."

"We be all puny critters."

"You don't recall the names of any of the Unioners?"

"Yes, there war a feller be th' name o' Many-cure, er Mocure, er somethin' o' that sort."

Gyp's heart bounded.

"Was he a colonel—Colonel Moncure?"

"A kunnel, er captain, er somethin' er 'nother—a briggidear gineral, mebby."

"Did he have a daughter?"

"'E had a gurl 'ith blue eyes an' a short frock. D'ye know 'em?"

"I have heard of them," evasively.

"Whar did ye hear?"

"Through Perk Thompson."

"What does ol' 'Sky Blue' know o' thim people?"

"Mighty little, Mr. Kluney, mighty little."

"'E orter been shot, ol' 'Sky Blue' ort."

"What did he do?"

"Helpt hang my dad."

"Your father?" in astonishment.

"Yep."

"Why?"

"Oh, dad, 'e been out a riddin' th' mountings o' thim pesky Unioners."

"And he was arrested?"

"No, stranger; 'e war hanged."

"That is very sad."

"We be all puny critters."

"But about Ard Stammel's family: Do you think Colonel Moncure aided her?"

"Yes. I heern he sent her money an' she clared out North."

"You do not know where they settled in the North?" Gyp eagerly asked, it must be confessed, with more of a desire to know of the location of Aida than of the widow of his friend.

"Manycure, I be heern, went t' Pitttburgh. Dunno whar th' widdy went."

"Pittsburgh!"

"Dunno whar it be, but that's whar I heern th' feller went."

A great light shone in the young man's soul. It seemed to light up a whole destiny. He had gotten hold of something definite—if reliable.

Suddenly a shadow swept across his face, and he inquired:

"There was another fellow, by the name of Habor, not a Union man, who had once captured this young lady during the war. Did you ever hear anything about him?"

"Gone North, too."

Then the light in Gyp's soul went out suddenly, and the revelation of Snags Groucher came back to him.

"When did he go North?"

"Some years atter th' Manycures."

"Did he know where the Moncures were living at the time he went North?"

"'E didn't know; but he said as how he'd find 'em ef he had ter scratch hell with a fine tooth comb."

"If that is where he's looking for Aida he'll find himself on the wrong trail."

"He had it in fer th' Manycures. He never fergot th' dab that gurl giv' him when he war a stealin' her on th' Swan's Neck."

Gyp's eyes flashed fire for a moment. All his composure fled at the awful thought of Aida's danger. It was not Moncure that the villain wanted. It was the girl who had wounded him on that mad dash around the curves of the Red Swan's Neck. Gyp's very soul took fire. He seemed unable to reason. His thoughts were in mutiny against the confusing situation in which he found himself. Hundreds of miles from her,

even if her locality were certainly known. What could he do? He grew faint at heart. His cheeks blanched as if he had received a stab in the heart.

"Be ye sick, stranger?"

"No," was the faint reply. "I'm myself, now."

"Here, tak' a sip o' this?" and Kluney reached for the black bottle again.

"Thank you. It is nothing. It is over now."

"That Habor's a catamount," Kluney said with an oath. "I'd like to skin 'im an' nail his hide on th' end o' th' woodshed. Cheated me in a mule trade," and he took a drink from his own bottle and replaced it on the mantel.

In Gyp's brain there was a tumult of fire and ice. Habor on the trail of Aida!

"Great God, protect her!"

He arose and went out into the night, that under the benign stars he might form his resolutions. If God would give him wings to-morrow he would be beyond the Ohio. But alas, men have only feet!


CHAPTER XXXI

BETWEEN THE RIVERS

It was long before Gyp got to sleep that night. The situation seemed so confusing and helpless. He tossed on his rude bed in his own home, his brain in a whirl, vainly trying to blaze a path through the dense jungle of his fears. It was toward morning when he fell into a troubled sleep, and in his sleep a vision came to him. He saw in his dreams a little city with quaint old buildings and narrow streets. A river flowed on either side of the city and the two streams merged and flowed unitedly to the sea. One of the rivers slipped between the city and the sea, forming a beautiful island, in the midst of which a banded lighthouse rose dark against the sky. He saw sails upon the water and ships upon the sea and the foam tumbling white upon the sandy beach. He saw fashionable carriages on the streets and the city filled with people in holiday attire.

He saw—or thought he saw—the waving of tall palmettoes and the swaying of long grey mosses from boughs of ancient trees. He heard the rippling music of mocking-birds and saw rich and beautiful flowers abloom everywhere.

On the bank of the eastern river a fair and



ant maiden stood and looked toward the east where the great ships were upon the water. She was robed in spotless white. Jewels flashed from her throat and fingers. Her face was as fair as the dream of an angel and she looked thoughtfully toward the infinite. He saw her lips part, and this is what the dream-voice brought to his eager soul:

"As these rivers unite and flow into the sea, so shall the lives of Gyp Stybright and—"

"Aida Moncure!" exclaimed the excited dreamer, and awoke to find the vision shattered, as if he had thrown a stone through a mirror.

But the dream was elysium.

There was no more sleep for Gyp, and he was infinitely glad when the morning began to edge its way through the chinks in the walls.

"What a vision! What does it mean?" he inquired, rubbing his eyes. "This may be a path through the jungle. Grant it, dear heaven!"

All his past came rushing back to him in a tumultuous cascade of memories. He thought of the happy days with Aida in the mountain camp, and wondered if the dream held any meaning for him. He wondered most of all at Aida's prolonged silence of the years, and why all direct knowledge of her since the day of their parting had been withheld from him. But there she stood in his vision, there by the river's side. Could there be any mistake about it? She was more beautiful than ever. She was a girl no

longer, but a charming woman, fairer than any he had ever seen.

What had she said?

"As these streams flow together, so shall the lives of Gyp Stybright and—" there it had stopped.

"Why did I in my consummate idiocy shut out the remainder of that sentence which might have meant happiness for me? Why did I awake and blot out that name which meant everything? Would she have joined her own name with mine, she so exquisite, so lovely, and I only a poor mountaineer without lineage, without name, without wealth?" Then he caught his breath at the remembrance of the treasure hid in the cave. "Ah, but she knows nothing of this. Could such extremes be harmoniously joined? Will my cherished happiness end as the vision ended, in a blank?"

His mind went back to Sunset Rock and to the startling vision of Snags Groucher. He conjured up the old cabin home and the smouldering embers. He saw again the rusty dagger of the peripatetic maniac—rusted with the blood of his father and mother. Then came the revelation of Lon Kluney of Aida's sojourn in the North and of the departure of the bloodthirsty Habor in search of her. These, with the vision of the night and the awful recollection of the preceding day stirred his brain until it whirled like a cyclone. He was almost beside himself. "God help

me!" he cried as he smote his brain and leaped to his feet. The upper and the nether worlds seemed to have chosen his humble cabin as a battle-field, and the fight was on. What would he do? There was but one thing to be done, find Aida and protect her from the man who had gone on her trail. He would search every clue. Find her he must. Find her he would. This very day he would speed away as fast as steam could carry him. No more sleep. The battle in the brain had murdered sleep.

Before leaving his room an incident occurred which gave a new turn to the program of the day—one of those trifling things which sometimes change the whole current of one's destiny. As he took his coat from the wall a letter fell from the pocket. He picked it up and saw that it was the one which Miss Larue had placed in his hands at parting. He hastily broke the seal and read:

"MR. STYBRIGHT:

"Find a city by the sea where two rivers meet and you will find happiness.

"MISS LARUE."

"The letter and the vision are one!" exclaimed he excitedly. "Where is the city? Where are the rivers? East, West, North, South; on lake shore or gulf shore, Pacific Coast or Atlantic? A city and two rivers! I saw them in my vision of the night. As the two streams unite, so shall

she and I, and she—she was Aida! I know it. That face is photographed on my soul from the days of the mountain camp, and though it change a thousand fold and become each day more radiant with the change, I cannot be deceived. 'Find the city and you will find happiness.' Happiness with her! Sweet heaven, bless thee forever, I shall find the city; I shall find the rivers; I shall find the peerless creature on the shore! But how? Aye, there's the rub; but find her I shall. The horror of my fear shall not extinguish the brightness of my hope."

He folded the letter and replaced it in his pocket, partook of a hurried breakfast and was gone over the mountains by the way he had come. "No northern mission till I see Miss Larue," he said to himself, and as he hurried away to Lasuda he thus reasoned:

"How does Miss Larue know all this? How did she come by such information? If she knows this much she knows more. If she knows there is happiness for me in the city between the rivers, she knows where those rivers are and where the city is. If she knows that there is happiness for me, she knows through whom that bliss is to come." Thus he mused and filled his mind with interrogations and deductions. He could not understand why she had not told him before he left the school. Had she known all these years where his dear Aida was residing? Had she kept the knowledge purposely from him? "And she was

so kind to me," he continued musingly. "Possibly it may have been just this cherished knowledge that made her so kind." As these thoughts perplexed him the beautiful Miss Larue became to him more of a problem than ever. "Certainly," he reasoned, "if this knowledge has been in her possession all these years it must have been withheld for some good and sufficient reason. But what could it be?"

He found Miss Larue sweet but uncommunicative.

"It is a confidence," she said to him. "You would not have me untrue to my promise?"

"Certainly not. What you have done, Miss Larue, I am sure must be right, but I cannot understand it."

"But you will bye and bye; and you will realize that what we have done for your especial comfort and happiness was the wisest thing to do."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

Miss Larue gave a little start, feeling that the inquiry had laid bare her secret.

"Miss Moncure and myself," she replied with a smile, admitting everything.

"Then she has understood all along?"

"You have not been forgotten."

"And you have kept in communication with her?"

"Yes."

"Is she married?"

"Bless your dear heart, no."

"There is one thing more I would like to ask: Does she think of me as in other days?"

For answer Miss Larue picked up a volume of Shakespeare, turned a few pages and pointing to a familiar sentiment, handed him the book. This is what he read:

"Doubt that the stars are fire;
Doubt that the world doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt my love."

Gyp was so overjoyed he could scarcely restrain his emotion. He sprang to his feet and grasped Miss Larue's hand with the fervor of a lover and could scarcely refrain from embracing her. He poured his gratitude into her ears and told her of the vision of the preceding night, of the city and the rivers and the charming lady on the river's shore and of the unfinished exclamation; and then he asked:

"Is it far from the junction of the rivers to the sea?"

"Considering the previous length of the rivers, yes."

"Then we shall have many years of bliss together?"

"Your hope runs ahead of your discovery, my young friend."

"But I shall find her, shall I not?"

"I am no interpreter of dreams, neither a

prophet nor the daughter of a prophet. I can only say that your vision corresponds to the present abiding place of Miss Moncure. The rest you must discover."

"I cannot ask you to break your pledge. You have been very kind; have told me far more than I dreamed of learning. But will you answer me this: To whom did you give your pledge?"

"To Miss Aida."

"Thank you very much, Miss Larue. But why this secrecy?"

"For reasons which Miss Aida will make known when you meet."

"And that city: is it East, West, North or South?"

"It is a city by the sea where the rivers meet. Your future happiness is largely a question of geography."

"And if I fail?"

"Then return to me."

CHAPTER XXXII

SOLVING THE RIDDLE

"A QUESTION of geography? What is the riddle? A maze with my darling at the center of it. Let me find the starting point and I will find the center. Give me the end of a thread and I will unravel a destiny. 'Find a little city by the sea where two rivers meet and you will find happiness.' So reads the riddle. Now if there were but one city in this broad land where two rivers meet the problem would be an easy one. Let me see: What's the matter with New York? The North River and the East River flow together and pass through the bay to the sea. And there, too is Philadelphia, with its Delaware and Schuylkill uniting and following in fellowship to the ocean. But this must be a city 'by' the sea. There is therefore a limitation. But is there but one sea on which a city with two rivers is located? Only one seaboard city where the rivers join? The proposition lacks definiteness. It is wanting in particulars. Let me read again," and he took Miss Larue's note from his pocket:

"'Find a little city by the sea where two rivers meet, and you will find happiness.'"

"Oh, I see; it is not 'the' city, but *a* city.

That's another proposition. I will examine my geography."

He turned to his text-book and ran his finger along the entire northern and eastern coast-lines, and cities by the sea he could find in plenty, but to his surprise, not one could he find where two rivers met to form another as suggested by the riddle. He examined the southern and western shores. He found cities on lake and river, on bay and river, on sound and river, on gulf and river, but strange to say his atlas indicated not one city where the rivers fulfilled the conditions. If such cities existed his geography did not show them.

"The maze is more intricate than I thought." Gyp threw himself back in his chair with his hands under his head.

"Let me read it again." Then, after a few moments' reflection: "It does not say 'on,' but *by*. But, of course, no city would be *on* the sea. 'By' is the proper word. I have read of lake villages built on piles; but there are no such places to bother me; and even if there were, two rivers could not meet there. Men do not build cities 'on' but *by* the sea."

He scanned the coast-line again, but with no better result.

"The path to the castle does not lie in that direction. I must seek it some other where."

He asked his neighbors. But what did they know about cities by the sea or anywhere else!

They could tell the roads to the little towns where they sold pork and eggs and traded mountain dew for salt and pepper. They could tell how the squirrels lived and where they made their run-aways. They could tell where the brooding vulture sat, and the burrow where the wild fox made his lair. Every peak and promontory, and every bridle-path over the great mountains, were familiar to them. But cities by the far-off seas were things they never worried over or even thought of. Gyp could get no information there, and he soon gave up trying. The lips of the teachers in the seminary were closed to him, and consultation there was out of the question. They had evidently conspired to have him pursue his investigation alone. "And they are right," he soliloquized, "for if Aida is worth having she is worth discovering." Miss Larue had given him a clue: this he must work out alone. In addition to this his dream had come as a flashlight.

"The dream! the dream!" he exclaimed, as if a sudden revelation had come to him. In his geographical explorations he had forgotten it. "Put the dream and the riddle side by side, and the two may lead me through the labyrinth. Strange that I had overlooked it. Did not the tantalizing Miss Larue say, 'The vision corresponds to the riddle?' Now what was the vision I saw?" he continued musing, "a little city lying between two rivers, and between one of the rivers and the sea there was an island. Now let me see: New

York lies between two rivers, and between it and the sea is Long Island. Here is the solution! Wait. Ah, this was a 'little' city, while New York is a great metropolis. In the dream the two rivers united and flowed as one river to the sea. But here the bay carries the waters of both rivers to the ocean. I must give this city up. Aida is not in New York.

"I saw, also, quaint, old fashioned buildings in my dream. These things do not correspond to the old Manhattan city. And then, too, I saw fashionable turnouts thronging the narrow streets, and bazars of curios everywhere. I saw luxurious hotels with wide piazzas thronged with patrician guests. These things suggest a fashionable resort rather than a great commercial center. I also saw in my dream clusters of tall palmettoes waving their luxurious fronds in parks and along street sides. I saw the narrow, ragged leaves of the banana, and grey mosses hanging from live oaks. I heard through it all the rollicking song of the mocking-bird.

"And so I must abandon all cities on the northern seaboard. The solution of the riddle lies not that way.

"But the circle is narrowing. It is possibly some resort away off on the Pacific."

He thought over the vision again.

"No, it could not have been on the Pacific coast," he contended, "for the woman in white stood on the beach and looked toward the sea and

the east. The river was between her and the island, and the island was between the river and the sea. She was therefore somewhere on the east coast and in one of the southern states. That is suggested by the palmettoes. So much is certain.

"And still the circle is narrowing."

Again he turned to his geography, but again he was hopelessly lost.

"Now," said he, "let me summarize what I have thus far learned. In the first place Miss Aida is in a city. She is in a little city. It is a fashionable city. It is some southern resort. It is on the Atlantic seaboard. It is an old city, with quaint buildings and narrow streets, yet with many great hotels. Where is there such a city?"

His geography and atlas gave him no satisfaction.

"It is more than a question of geography, at least such a geography as Miss Larue has placed in my hands. I will examine my history."

He reached up to a little swinging shelf by the window, took down a history of the United States and turned to the early Spanish explorations in Florida. There an old print of that portion of the state familiar to the explorers met his eyes.

"I have it! I have it!" he shouted as he flung the book on the floor and jumped to his feet, flinging his hat against the wall. "E-u-r-e-ka! The little city, the city with the waving palms and quaint old buildings, the city between the rivers!

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The Matanzas! the San Sebastian! and the island of Anastasia! Hooray! I have threaded the maze. I have reached the citadel. Ye gods, I've won. What's the matter with Old St. Augustine!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

DE CHRYSALIS DONE BROKE

"BLESSED be steam. Heaven crown with fadeless laurels the man who first harnessed the invisible spirit of steam to the flying wheels."

Thus thought the excited lover as he hurried away toward the Mecca of his hopes in the land of Ponce de Leon. How the villages sped away and the little cabins danced and pirouetted, and larger dwellings courtesied to the chambered thunderbolt as it bored its way through fields and forests like an arrow from the bow of Omnipotence. What pictured beauty was enrolled as the green canvas, dashed with stream and foliage and blue background of sky, was whisked out of view! Downward—downward—downward swept the windowed wonder with the golden eagles on its glowing panels. But swifter than steam are a lover's hopes. Even the thunderbolt creeps with laggard step when the desire of one's heart is at the world's end. The wires overhead sang their æolian strains to the wooing winds, but they brought no message to the separated lovers.

The St. John's river was crossed and down through the timbered tracts the whirring wheels ran toward the sea. Through fields of palmet-

toes, through groves of lime and lemon and orange; past emerald oaks, sinewy and sympathetic, whose hoary mosses waved in the winds like old men's beards. Flowers starred the fields and the air was spice-laden. A long screech of the locomotive swept through the streaming pennants of the live oaks; a liveried porter thrust his head through the doorway, gobbled some indistinguishable name into the faces of the passengers and darted back as if a pestilence had smitten him. The wheels slowed down, ground hard upon the brakes, and the train stood still.

Gyp stepped upon the platform at St. Augustine.

Half a hundred carriages with their noisy drivers, an equally vociferous delegation of runners from various hotels and lodging houses, the noise of escaping steam, the rattle of trunks and trucks on the platform caused him to think that he had landed at the tower of Babel. He threaded his way through the tumult, leaped into a trap and soon was driven out of the hurly-burly.

"Do you know Richard Moncure?" Gyp inquired of the driver.

"Ize a heahed ob dat name, sah; I has, suah."

"Then you do not know him?"

"I cayn't jes' say as how I knows on him; but Ize a heahed tell ob dat name; I hez, done suah; an' ef 'e be a livin' heah I'll fin' 'im fo' yo'."

"Can you get me a directory?"

"Dunno, boss. I hayn't got none in me pants; but Ize got some fine cut, ef it's t'baccy you's atter."

"I want a directory, a book that tells where people live."

"Boss, yer don't need no book. Ize gwine drive yo' right dar."

"Drive me to the post-office. I'll make inquiry there."

"All a-right, boss; but tha's a fixin' up the street. It's all tored up, an I'll jes' tak' yo' roun' dishaway."

They turned into a narrow street and drove down toward the barracks at the lower end of town.

As they came out on a little park near the Matanzas Gyp was surprised to find the streets filled with fashionable carriages and gay turnouts of one kind and another. Men and women were in holiday attire. Hundreds of well-dressed people stood about the enclosure, lounged on the park benches, sat along the sea-wall or occupied their fashionable equipages. It was a gay and animated scene upon which the young mountaineer looked. The band sent its martial strains crashing upon the air. At the farther end of the parade ground a many-jointed flagstaff flung the stars and stripes in one magnificent mass of color upon the winds. Beyond the sea-wall lay the placid river. Its plain of crystal was unbroken, save where an occasional sail whitened the water

or a ship's keel left its vanishing scar. Beyond the river was the Island of Anastasia. The dark green of its foliage lying irregularly against the horizon was relieved by an occasional dwelling and the white dunes flung up by the distant ocean. Out of the midst of the irregular mass of green the tall Anastasia light lifted its picturesque and cylindrical shaft in bands of white and black spirals.

It was a restful picture, new and entrancing to the young man from the North Carolina mountains. But the one thing that filled his mind above all others was his dream and the message of Miss Larue. He could not dismiss it from his mind. There was the Matanzas; yonder lay Anastasia, and out beyond it throbbed the blue ocean. Somewhere on this shore his dream had pictured the darling of his heart with her rapt gaze fixed upon the distant sea, or was it the island? He looked nervously about him. Would he find her, now that he had come all this long distance? The sudden stopping of the trap, in the midst of the great throng, brought his reverie to an end.

"Woa, dah; yo' dum beas'," came in staccato notes from the driver. "Watch whar yo' gwine wid dem slammin' hoofs o' yo'n."

"What's the meaning of this gathering, driver?" Gyp inquired.

"De mil'tary ban' gibs er open-aiah concuht fo' de bennyfit o' de town an' sich as hab eahs an'

want t' heah. Ef yo' lak t' heah de music I'll jes' keep mah hoss chuck up."

Gyp was intensely fascinated with the scene about him. The band finished its program and marched away. But still the crowd lingered. Suddenly the notes of a bugle blown from the barracks caused him to turn. He saw the troops in their white uniforms march in rhythmic hexameters upon the green, while the band sent its patriotic strains far away beyond the crest of Anastasia. It was the first real warlike array he had ever seen, and he watched it with intense interest. A sentry paced to and fro to prevent intrusion upon the grounds by the too eager yet admiring spectators. Color-bearers marched across the plaza, and, with their ensigns, took their places at the head of the column. Around the parade ground there was a living fence, a solid wall of nationalities—the Syrian from his bazar, the Jew from his gems and sandalwood, the German from his beer shop and his cups, the Cuban from his booth of Havanas, the African from his siesta in the sun and the Minorcan from his truck fields. There, too, were greasy loafers whittling their misconsidered lives away, the magnate and the newsboy, the minister with his creed and the politician with his muckrake. What a polyglot it was! The thunder of the sunset gun sent its reverberations over city, island and river, and the mass of patriotic color which all day long waved from the towering flagstaff, dropped from

its place of honor and was folded up for the night. The blue files of soldiers moved like a poem over the greensward, and in faultless rhythm, went through their varied evolutions. It all seemed so new, so wonderful, so unique and beautiful that Gyp was content to gaze upon it in admiring silence. He forgot for the moment the dream of his highland home and the blissful purpose that had brought him, a stranger, to this quaint old Spanish city.

At length the troops marched back to their quarters and the crowds of spectators began to disperse. The sea-wall was soon deserted, park benches were emptied and the carriages rolled away. Gyp ordered his driver on; but in turning into the crowded street the wheel of his trap became interlocked with the wheel of a carriage turning in the opposite direction. The crash frightened the spirited team in the carriage and they sprang forward almost overturning both vehicles. The driver checked his horses in a moment, but the leader, a magnificent creature, sleek as velvet, with eyes flashing fire, reared, pawed the air with his angry hoofs, and in his descent, veered toward his excited and nervous companion and landed across the pole of the carriage. He struggled and plunged and finally threw himself, bringing the other horse to the ground with him. All was uproar and confusion. Women shrieked and ran to places of safety. Men ran to help or to get out of the way, while some seized upon the

struggling horses as they lay entangled in their harness.

The only occupant of the carriage, now that the driver had leaped to the help of his horses, was a young lady who sat calm in the midst of the excitement until the beautiful leader sprang into the air when she became nervous. But when the furious steed fell she turned her face toward the trap in which Gyp was seated and called:

"Will someone please assist me?"

Gyp sprang to her rescue, and throwing open the carriage door, helped her to a place of safety.

"I thank you very much," she said, looking gratefully into his strong and manly face. "You have saved my—"

She stopped suddenly. Her expression of gratitude changed to one of inquiry, then to astonishment. Their eyes met. Surely she had seen that face before. And Gyp? Never had he heard so sweet a voice but once, nor beheld such a beautiful face except in his vision. Yes, it was she! Yes, it was he! The North Carolina mountains; the school in the grove; the fearful ride down the Red Swan's Neck!

"Aida Moncure! You darling creature!" Gyp exclaimed, as he saw in that radiant being the vision of his highland dream.

"Why, Gyp—you precious boy—is this? It is! It is!" came from the bewildered Aida. The suddenness of their meeting seemed to paralyze their tongues for a moment and they stood smil-

ing confusedly into each other's faces, as "eyes looked love to eyes that spake again."

"My darling," Gyp stammered, "this is a most delicious surprise."

"It does not seem possible! How good and strong and happy you look," she replied with the lovelight illuminating her face.

"Bless you, Sweet, who wouldn't look happy with a heart such as mine and a vision like this before me?"

The crowd surged about the struggling horses and some cried one thing and some another:

"Keep away from his heels!"

"Sit down on his head!"

"Cut the harness and let him up!"

"Get away there and give room!"

Amid the uproar no one seemed to notice the reunited lovers, except Gyp's old obsequious driver who pocketed his fare and with a broad grin watched the happy couple walk away.

"Ize a-heahed tell ob gettin' honey out'n de cawkus ob a lion, but dis am de fust time Ize ebbah heah'd ob two sweethawts a leapin' out'n a smashup into each oddeh's awms! De crys'lis done broke dat time, suah; an de buttehfly done mak' off wid annoddeh fly! Yah, yah, yah!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

ROSES AND PALMS

ONLY the votaries of love will understand the sacred sanctuary where the hearts of Gyp and Aida offered their incense. Their happiness made them oblivious to all surroundings. Gyp saw not the quaintness of old St. George street nor heeded the rough cobble stones under his feet. He saw not the overhanging balconies beneath which the draymen drove their springless two-wheeled carts and in which gaily attired maids and matrons sat and chatted of their dull, sublunary affairs. He did not notice the absence of sidewalks or that the doors of the dwellings broke the plain, concrete walls on a level with the street. He saw not the rich foliage that rose above garden walls, or the hidden lawns where the spray of concealed fountains wasted itself among the blossoming trees. Palms extended their graceful fronds above the lovers' heads as if in benediction, but they saw them not. Gyp saw nothing of the quaint old city and Aida's vision was no better. How the world shrivels in presence of our infatuations!

Aida laid her jeweled hand on a small wicker gate. It opened to her touch, and the lovers

passed from the street into a spacious lawn adorned with shrubs and trees and all manner of flowers. The walk on either side was flanked with a brilliant mosaic of color. The lawn was abloom with roses. Foliage plants, like oriental rugs, lay here and there upon the greensward. Jessamine climbed the trellises. Tall cabbage palms stood like sylvan priests in this charming court of nature. The date-palm, a patriarch among its fellows, looked benignly upon the sweethearts. Gyp's observing eyes rested upon magnolias and fig trees, upon Japanese plums, spice myrtle and rubber plant. He saw the bamboo and bananas, while flowers of countless variety were everywhere. It was a charming sight for the young highlander. And there, too, was Aida, the sweetest flower of them all! It seemed as if he had entered paradise at last.

Heaven grant that the devil may not find his way into it!

Aida paused long enough to indicate to Gyp the especial beauty of the place and to point out its most interesting features. They then passed up the broad steps of an umber-colored villa and took seats on the piazza with this charming picture in the foreground. To Gyp it was idyllic, a vision of fairyland.

"Like Israel of old we are still living in booths," said Aida, turning her radiant face upon her companion. "This is but our temporary home."

"I am sure," replied Gyp, graciously, "that no

wilderness could be so fit an abiding place for my charming Israelite as this bower of beauty. Miriam's timbrel would never be silent here."

"But where is the ransomed host to call forth the exultant strains?" answered the sweet young pessimist, with a smile.

"Look at me," her companion responded, "haven't I just got out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage? Not much of a Moses, I'll admit, nor much of a host, but I'm out of the bondage in which your loveliness first found me. I have come through my Red Sea, and it has opened almost miraculously before me, and here I have found, not only this magnificent wilderness of floral glory, but Miriam as well."

"And I see that you have 'learned langwidge' since we first met in your highland Goshen," she answered with a sweet, rollicking laugh.

"Yes, thanks to my good friends known and unknown."

"And thanks to yourself. I can scarcely believe as I look into your face, so changed, so manlier grown, that you are the same little bare-foot Gyp who undertook to teach me 'bug knowledge' in those crazy days on the mountains."

"And it is just as hard for me to realize that you are the same gentle Charon who rowed me over the black and lonely Styx that awful night when I found my father and his neighbors murdered. And yet if I lost much in those never-to-be-forgotten days I also gained much; for out of

them has come my education, humble as it is, and the antecedent happy associations formed by those times of privation and peril."

"And I am sure our happiness is mutual, as our trials and misfortunes then were. Do you remember the bluebells and the yellow lady-slippers and the white blossoms of the tulip trees?"

"Miss Aida, I shall never forget, not while mocking birds sing and the azaleas bloom in my native mountains."

"Oh, they were such dear times in spite of all the hazard of brutal war."

"Do you think of them that way? I am so glad, for a hundred times I have lived again those immortal days, and there was no joy there except as associated with yourself. And as I have thought them all over again and again life has seemed more beautiful with each returning memory. But I would not think you would care to recall them."

"And the reason is?"

"Well, with me that was home, and I had been familiar with all the hardships incident to that wild life. But you were reared otherwise, and those wild scenes and wilder men were so foreign to all your previous years. The wonder is that you endured it and lived through it."

"I just delighted in it, and the memory of those days is one of my greatest luxuries. It is the one romance of my life."

"Mixed up with those rough mountaineers?"

"No little maiden ever had such a body-guard of noble patriots and unselfish friends. I felt as safe and happy as if engirdled by walls of bristling steel."

"But I remember once on a time a young and happy maiden fell into the hands of the enemy."

"And I recall a brave young mountaineer who came to the rescue. By the way, Gyp, what has become of my old captor, Jim Habor?"

"Do you know nothing?" Gyp interrogated, recalling the information he had gained a short time before leaving his native state.

"No. I have never heard of him since that day."

"The report in the mountains was that he had followed you North."

"But we did not go North."

"Not go North?" Gyp inquired in amazement. "It was reported among your old friends and neighbors that when the camp broke up you and your dear father returned to the home of his childhood."

"That was our original intention; but after we had started we changed our minds and returned to our old home in North Carolina. But we remained there only a few hours, everything was so sad and desolate. From there we went to New Orleans, then around by water to this dear old town; and from here we made our way to Spain and spent years abroad."

"Praise God we were all deceived and Habor

missed his mission. But we will drop that subject."

At that moment the angelus sounded from the old cathedral and seemed to hang in the air like an unforgotten hope.

For a blissful hour they sat in the shelter of the dying day. It was a time when the immortal past came back again and between the joy of the days that were gone and the bliss of the passing moment their hearts were filled to overflowing.

As Gyp walked down St. George street that night he was unspeakably happy. The thing that he hoped for had come to him.

As he turned out of the street he felt a sudden revulsion of feeling. He felt that everything was not right. He was almost sure that someone was following him. But it was easy to be mistaken. The streets were full of people. Need he think strange that there were those following him when scores of men and women were yet abroad? It was but an hallucination. He would dismiss it from his mind. He passed into his hotel, yet in spite of everything a specter seemed to haunt him. He exchanged a few whispered words with the clerk and went directly to his room.

It was an hour or more after he had gone to his apartment that a dissipated creature entered the office and with sinister countenance looked around the lobby. He went to the clerk's desk, glanced over the register, turned about and passed out into the street.

Aida meanwhile had gone within the villa. The floors were soft with luxurious rugs. Rich portiers hung in the doorway. Paintings by master hands adorned the walls. The entire furnishing was in harmony with refined taste and gave an air of restfulness to the apartments. She ascended the stairway to her chamber, a pleasant apartment facing the south and west. Two windows, hung with spotless lace, looked out upon St. George street, and two looked down upon the lawn with its wealth of floral beauty. The room was not lavish in its appointments. A center table, dripping with faultless needle work, showed the touch of her own artistic hand. A few easy chairs, dresser and luxurious lounge, a bed with graceful canopy, and modest axminster on the floor completed the furnishings. The walls, ornate with bric-a-brac, photographs and souvenirs from foreign lands, showed the skillful arrangement of a woman's hand.

"What a day this has been!" Aida soliloquized, throwing herself on the couch and losing herself in delightful reverie. Her mind went back over those picturesque and stormy days in the mountains. She thought of their "school," of the days and nights of peril, of her capture by Habor and their awful flight down the mountain road. She thought of the end of the war and of the movements of herself and father afterward and of his subsequent death. All came back to her as clear as the stars in her beautiful southern sky. There

came also a consciousness of her ingratitude toward her lover in that she had never let him know of her movements. "And there are other things which will gladden us both by explanation."

She arose in response to a rap at the door. On opening it the bell-boy placed a letter in her hand. She closed the door and tore open the seal. It contained a card with one line scrawled across it. The blood left her cheeks as she read:

"I am Jim Habor. I'm onto your game. Beware."

"My God, help us!" she exclaimed as she clasped her hands and pressed them to her heart. She paced the room, every faculty of brain and soul in tumult. "Great God keep this serpent out of my Eden!" she cried, lifting her imploring eyes to heaven. Then she threw herself on the couch, but in a moment rose and went to a trunk in the corner of the room, took out the trays and down in the bottom of it she found a little box which she placed on the table. She opened it and took out a pistol and a box of cartridges. "It's well enough to pray; but I'll see that my gun is all right." She had not forgotten the days in the mountains when she had learned the use of firearms. She filled the cylinder of her revolver, laid it on the table, and replaced the box and trays in her trunk.

"Oh, if I could only warn Gyp!" she sighed, "but he did not tell me where he was lodging. God be with him till we meet again."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE OLD SPANISH FORT

AIDA lay with her pistol under her head that night, though what she expected to do with it she scarcely knew. But in some way she felt a security in having it near. She knew how remorseless Habor was, and she might need protection against his vengeance. She had not forgotten her target practice, and she felt that she might be called upon to make some use of it in personal defense. Habor's enmity might be vented upon her or upon Gyp, but if upon either it would be upon both. The tumult in her soul was something terrible. She had just entered her Eden. The happiness for which she had waited so long had at last come to her. Now to have it dashed to earth as if beneath an avalanche of snow!

"Oh, I wish that Gyp would come!" she sighed. But what would she say to him? Would it be wise to tell him of the menace contained in the note of the previous night? It would destroy his happiness as well as her own. Why should she blight this hour of his consummate bliss? Maybe her fears were unduly aroused. Could she not trust her lover to meet an emergency

should it ever come? And if it should not come, why blight his pleasure with her direful forebodings?

But could she pull the fear from her own heart and meet him with a smile, with the delirious self-oblivion of yesterday? Could she cast off the presentiment which all night long had haunted her, and appear her own dear happy self when he came? She would try. She would thrust this devil of apprehension out of the Eden of her bliss and be happy for the day; then she would tell him. He must know. If anything should happen to him unwarned, she would never forgive herself.

They had just made the circuit of the terreplein at old Fort Marion and stood facing the east. The Hot-shot furnace was beneath them. Beyond it the water-battery, on whose escarpment a black-throated cannon crouched like a watch-dog and looked sullenly over the bay. On their right the Matanzas river lay bright in the sunlight, calm as a saint of God awaiting his coronation. The winds which breathed on the palms were not sufficient to fill the fisherman's sails, as, almost imperceptibly, they moved over the waveless water. In front of them the river widened into the bay. Anastasia arose green beyond the river, with the white and black spirals of the lighthouse rising out of its feathery ridge. To the left the sand dunes of North Beach glistened in the sun, and between the green of the marshy

plain on the south and the glimmering sand hills on the north the bay made its escape into the sea. Black backs of dolphins undulated in the water as they floated here and there, and Gyp thought he understood why, in the early days of the Spanish explorers, this river was called "The River of Dolphins." Far away to the east the blue line of the horizon dipped ocean-ward, while the ceaseless threnody of the sea sounded faint where the crested sand-bars shone white with the combs of dissolving foam.

They were reclining on the parapet wrapped in admiration of the scene and its sweet tranquillity.

"Will you be seated?" and Gyp motioned toward an empty settee. "This beautiful vision will still be ours and we can look upon it without weariness."

Reluctantly Aida removed her eyes from the bay. It was not the scene that entranced her at that moment. It was a small craft near the Anastasia shore in which two men were seated. One was handling the limp sail and the other sat with his glass trained upon the fort. Aida could not distinguish the features of the men, but there rushed across her mind the warning of the night before and she thought of Habor. Could that be he, and had he recognized them? Was that his glass which seemed to sweep the embrasures in front of her? Then she gave her head a toss, as if to say, Why these fears? Are there not hun-

dreds of pleasure seekers passing over these waters every day? Why should not this historic fort be an object of interest? They are but tourists out for a sail.

"Yes, Gyp; it is a beautiful scene. I never grow weary of it. A hundred times I have climbed the grey stairs to look upon it. It brings me rest."

"This old fort has some remarkable history," Gyp observed, glancing about him.

"But few histories are more picturesque. That river there, the Matanzas, has had its sands drenched with the blood of many a martyred Huguenot. It might well be called 'The River of Blood.' But I do not care to speak of those horrid days. It is better to be in harmony with the happier scenes around us."

"Let the past keep its tragedies. Ours be the bliss of to-day," Gyp agreed.

"It is better to date beginnings from pleasant events than from sad ones."

"Some way I'm not very philosophical to-day. My heart is not in that scene but in this settee."

"It is a good place to be," she responded with a winsome smile.

"You are not disappointed that I do not grow exuberant over dolphins and fishing smacks when I have waited all these years for a sight of your blessed face."

"The beauty of the things we look at are but comparative after all. Every hour has its com-

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paratives and superlatives," she replied meditatively.

"This seems so unreal to me. It seems as if I were a chapter in a fairy tale, and passing through some other fellow's experience."

"Do you wish it were a chapter out of fairy-land?"

"Heaven bless you, darling. The bliss of this hour is greater than I ever dared to dream: I, the hatless, bootless ragamuffin among the wild azaleas of the North Carolina mountains. Isn't it good for the soul?" he exclaimed with a burst of laughter, which recalled to Aida the old backwoods days.

"Your dreams are surely coming true, and so are mine."

"And have you dreamed, too?"

"They were more than dreams."

"What were they?"

"Noonday hopes."

"Have you been living all these years in the hope that we would meet again?"

"It has been the one bright thread of gold that ran through all the web of years; the one thread that has never tarnished, the one that has remained unsullied amid time and change, pleasure and pain."

"And that hope has been my beacon light, even when I gave Sam Crew that wallop out in the Lasuda woods," laughed the glad-hearted lover.

"Sam Crew? Who is he?"

"Oh, Sam was one of the boys at school whom I had to trounce in order to make him friendly. He was a tough customer."

"How did the plan succeed?"

"Made him the best friend I had among the pupils."

"That's certainly a novel method of making friends."

"Sam was nothing if not novel. Oh, but that was a lark. I'll tell you about it some day. Let's take a walk."

They made the circuit of the terreplein. A few strolling tourists sauntered here and there, leaned over the parapet or gazed through the quaint towers on the points of the spear-shaped bastions. As they descended the broad stairs and turned away from the fort, Aida said:

"Do you know, dear Gyp, ever since that day on the Red Swan's Neck a presentiment has once and again swept across the horizon of my brightest hopes?"

"Habor?"

"Yes, Habor."

"Oh, you dear, sweet, brave little girl! Do not let such things worry you. Habor has disappeared from our knowledge for years. He left for the north shortly after you left for the south, and he has been unknown to his old haunts ever since."

"For all that, my darling, I am sometimes afraid. Let us be on our guard." She hoped

from this he might understand, or at least surmise her meaning.

"We'll 'trust God and keep our powder dry.' We will not permit any ill omen to darken the sky of our happiness. We'll meet our troubles when they come. Till then," said he, "we will be happy."

Arm in arm they passed the pyramids of black balls and antiquated cannon and came into the delirious sunlight and fragrance of the park. But neither of them noticed a dark, heavy-browed idler who leaned over the wall gazing down at the fiddler-crabs in the marshy bottom of the moat.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE RED LIGHT

As Gyp passed down street on his way to his hotel he saw hanging in front of a drinking resort a red light which swung, like a danger signal, before the entrance. Its lurid glare was to him most suggestive. As he drew near he heard angry voices, followed by the report of a pistol and a sharp cry of pain. The door flew open and a man plunged into the street hatless and coatless, whom Gyp, had he been better acquainted with the city, would have recognized as Emil Roberts, the worst desperado of the neighborhood. His arms were bare to the elbows and, pistol in hand, he fled before his pursuers. They called upon him to halt, but he only ran the faster. They came directly toward Gyp, who stepped aside to let them pass. A shot was fired by one of the pursuers. A fusillade followed in the midst of obscenity and the vilest imprecations. Gyp was struck by a stray shot, and, with a cry of pain, placed his hand to his side, staggered toward the nearest building and fell heavily to the street. He lay bleeding for some minutes before the police succeeded in dispersing the crowd and calling an ambulance. Emil Roberts

lay wounded only a few feet from where Gyp fell. He was thrown into the ambulance and the two wounded men, lying side by side, were conveyed to the hospital.

Gyp's wound was found to be severe. The ball entered his left side and passing obliquely through the lung, lodged in the muscles of the back. It gave him severe pain, and his pale face, almost as white as the pillow on which it rested, was in striking contrast to the ruddy cheeks which his native mountains had given him as an inheritance. The only thought in his mind was the pain which the news of his injury would bring to Aida. He managed as soon as possible to have a note conveyed to her. She came at once to his bedside, and with her love and sympathy and the deep tenderness of her ministrations made the first night of this most deplorable tragedy one never to be forgotten. There was a blending of pleasure and pain that neutralized the acuteness of suffering and added a sweetness to their grief.

Aida was at first disposed to connect the injury to her lover with the threat of Habor. But when she came to the hospital and learned the circumstances surrounding his wounding she felt that it might have been one of those unfortunate accidents which may sometimes happen to the innocent. And yet she was not altogether satisfied. The matter would be investigated. Meantime her place was beside the sufferer.

Gyp had little to say as he lay there so white with pain and the loss of blood. But he was not unconscious of the sweet and gentle ministries of the angel of his hope as she bent over him with a tenderness which the angels themselves might almost envy. Never were hands more soothing or ministries more sympathetic and helpful. Every want was anticipated through the long and painful night. Her hand was on his pulse, or soothed his brow; and when the surgeon and nurse had gone aside for consultation, she deemed it neither sin nor sacrilege to press her own warm, ruddy lips against the pale cheek of the sufferer. Once she turned aside and bowed her fair face in her hands to weep over the needless pain to the one she loved. The calm, uncomplaining heroism with which he met his misfortune was only superseded by the brave and noble spirit which kind heaven had sent to his side for such a time as this.

In the meantime the one who was the cause of all this suffering and confusion of hope, the drunken murderer, Emil Roberts, lay only a short distance away on the same floor. His wound was much more serious than Gyp's, and only the most careful nursing would save his life, and if saved it would be but for the gallows, as his victim of the saloon brawl lay dead in the morgue. The murder was so causeless, so unprovoked, that should Roberts recover he must expiate his guilt in accordance with that age-old, universal law

of our race, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed."

Days and weeks passed. Aida was untiring in her attendance upon her lover. But not infrequently she paused at the cot of the poor wretch who had been the cause of all her distress and the bodily pain of the one whom she held so dear. For this man she entertained no enmity. Many a delicacy she left at his couch in the name of Him who assures us that such kindness shall not fail of its reward. Not infrequently she shared with him some provision which she had prepared for the one whose white cot was now the dearest spot on earth to her. She could not have it in her heart to cherish resentment against one whose suffering was so keen and who must so soon appear before the judgment bar of God. She would not turn aside from a kindness which might bring some brief ray of sunshine into his heart and lead him to serious thoughts.

Meanwhile Gyp was rapidly recovering. He was beginning to converse hopefully with those about him. One day, as he leaned against a barricade of pillows, Aida pulled a chair up alongside and said:

"Gyp, dear, I have something real good to tell you."

"Everything you tell me, dearest, is good, always good," and he laid his pale hand upon hers. "What is it now, dear?"

"Darling, I have been waiting a long time for

this opportunity. But the doctor cautioned me to wait until you were stronger. Now you will soon be able to leave the hospital and there cannot be any possible danger, so I am not going to keep my secret any longer."

"And you have been hiding secrets from me all these weeks. What a remarkable woman you are."

"You didn't think I could do it? But then you know I had to. When it comes to saving your precious life, I can keep a secret. Now, here it is: do you remember the escaped prisoner, Mr. Conway, who came to your father's home years ago?"

"Indeed I do remember him, very well."

"And do you remember the time I met you both in my little boat that dark night, and then later when Mr. Conway left us and made his way North to join the Federal army?"

"Very distinctly, dear," and Gyp wondered why she asked these questions.

"Ten days or more ago I had a visit from Mr. Conway. Now you are surprised, I know."

"Indeed you do surprise me. There is no man I would rather meet. Is he still here?"

"No, he has gone. But you will see him later. You were too ill to see him at the time. He came hurriedly, especially on your account, and was very much disappointed in not seeing you, but was rejoiced to know that you were on the sure road to recovery."

"How did he know I was here?"

"Gyp, dear, the awful tragedy of that night when you were so sorely wounded was published everywhere. Mr. Conway saw an account of it in a northern paper and he dropped his business and came down to see you and render what aid he could."

"That was certainly most kind of him. I wish I could have seen him."

"He's such a fine looking man; not much like the skeleton that came tottering to your door. He said that since the war he had lost track of you, and many a time had wondered what had become of the barefoot lad who had befriended him when there was only a step between him and death. He is an iron manufacturer in Pennsylvania and is at the head of an extensive business. More than that, Gyp, he has made you an offer of a very lucrative position in the mills as soon as you are able to travel. He will write you in a few days giving particulars, and will later call upon you. And so, dear, you see your misfortune has not been wholly a misfortune, for it has given you a powerful friend, provided a lucrative business; and then just think of how much dearer we are to each other than ever before."

"My darling, it did not need any such pain as we have endured to prove our love for each other. But, somehow, it all seems too good to be true."

"It does seem that way; and how do you sup-

pose I kept it all these many days," she answered smilingly, and patted his pale cheek tenderly. "Do you know it reminds me of Samson's riddle?"

"Samson's riddle? What's that?"

"Oh, you precious heathen! Don't you know your Bible? Listen: 'Out of the eater came forth meat and out of the strong came forth sweetness.'"

"That's a beautiful riddle, but I don't see any point to it."

"You blessed skeptic! Now don't be too critical, please, and remember that I never studied theology, except in your 'School of Philosophy.' But let this be the interpretation of the thing: Out of your adversity has come forth a changed destiny, and out of your pain has come forth fortune. Now how do you think I would do for a professor in exegesis, or whatever the word is?"

"Bless you, darling, you are equal to a whole theological seminary, and a nunnery thrown in for good measure. But, talking about fortunes reminds me that I have yet to tell you of my great discovery." Gyp then told his sweetheart of the crystal caverns and of what he had found there in the King's Treasury; he told her of his twilight plannings with Miss Larue and of the use he desired to make of his riches. And as they talked together they already saw in vision a great moral and intellectual transformation, educational and religious centers to which the boys

and girls were coming as doves to their windows. They saw the lowly cabins giving place to cultured homes, church spires and college belfries. They saw flouring mills and manufacturing plants take the place of the crude still, and the rugged patriotism of the people forging to a higher civilization when the mountains and the hills would sing together in mutual prosperity.

The days following this conversation Gyp was wonderfully exuberant. He longed for the time when he would be discharged from the hospital. His companion in suffering grew daily more sullen and uncommunicable; at times so profane and blasphemous that he was unapproachable. His wounds healed slowly. He had little to say to his nurse. He was peevish, fretful, complaining, when not too sullen to speak at all. He was irritated by the pleasantries of those who tried to cheer him, and gave vent to frequent outbursts of profanity when the least thing went wrong. When told that Gyp would soon be out of the hospital he became furious and cursed the unhappy fate which compelled him to suffer when others were enjoying freedom from bodily torture. His face grew livid, and he railed out at Gyp and Aida, the nurse, and everyone who came near or had anything to do with him.

His passion was terrible, and some were inclined to think him insane from his suffering. Watching his opportunity when his physician and nurse were out of the room, and Aida had gone

down street on an errand, he arose from his cot and made his way tremblingly and half-blind in his weakness toward the couch where Gyp lay asleep. He staggered along the way, holding on to chairs and tables until he reached the cot whereon the sleeper lay unconscious of what was before him. Roberts glared down at him a moment like a wild animal, then grasping him by the throat with his weak and nerveless hand, threw himself upon him and hissed through his teeth:

"Curse you, I've got you at last! You're in my power now. You don't remember me. You think my name's Roberts. It's a lie. It's Habor. Jim Habor. Do you know me now, you cursed rat! This beard has been my disguise. We met on the Red Swan's Neck. Now we meet on the brink of hell. Prepare to meet your God. Your wound was not an accident. I shot you, and I shot to kill. I've shadowed that girl for months. There's the wound she made on my wrist and here's the scar of the gunshot in my side. Curse her and you! I've watched you both since you came. Now it's the end. Die!" and he grasped a knife, a short-bladed fruit knife which the nurse had left on the stand, and with all the hate and enfeebled strength which he could command, his devilish eyes flashing their triumph, raised his trembling arm to strike, when, like Abraham of old, the uplifted hand was stayed as the blood rushed to his brain. The room grew

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black as night about him; his knees gave way and he fell to the floor as a sack of grain might have fallen. A few minutes later when the nurse entered the room she found Habor dead on the floor and Gyp speechless from the shock.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE OLD PARSON GOES A FISHING

ONE of the surprises that awaited Gyp on his discharge from the hospital was the finding of his old friend, the Rev. William Watchcob at the breakfast table the first morning after going to his hotel. He was the same old, angular, grey-bearded man, much older in appearance, but with the same snappy eyes hidden beneath their craggy brows.

"Ever go a fishin'?" the old man inquired after a dozen or more questions had been asked and answered.

"Not in this neighborhood," responded the young convalescent.

"Like fishin'?" without raising his eyes from the breakfast table.

"I'm not greatly interested."

"Well I am. I look upon fishin' as a very orthodox callin'; has good ancestry about the old lake o' Galilee. Comes well connected. Conduces to repose o' soul, fishin' does. It gives the nerves a sort o' felicitous settin'. Twixt nibbles lies the promised land o' Contemplation, and twixt contemplations you haul in your suckers. Want to go?"

"I've some mighty important business on hand, parson."

"Drop business and fish."

"Back by noon?"

"Long afore it. I'll come when ye want."

"Then I'll go." After his long confinement he thought the outing would do him good.

"Driver," said the old man a little later, "you know where I was yesterday? Drive us there."

They drove out of town, through long reaches of palmetto scrub and patches of pine where the verdureless sand lay glistening in the sun.

"Yes, Gyp, I'm still a Baptis' preacher, retired from active service. I'm enjoyin' the consolations o' my theology 'thout pesterin' about unrooly sinners or bein' pestered by 'em. But you see I still have a hankerin' after the water, same as a loon, same as a goose. Hence my fishin' proclivities. A Baptis', y' know, is a creetur partakin' largely o' the duck natur. Divin' an' paddlin' in the crick is sort o' hereditary. No matter how far you carry him into the scrub he will waddle back quack-quackin' to the pool. Ye can't wean 'im f'm the aqueous element."

When they reached the water the old man lost no time in getting down to work, and was better rewarded for his toil than the ordinary piscatorial adventurer. Every catch was followed with a running comment, or homily, with his fish for a text.

"You're a well-to-do sort of a fellow," he commented, as he twisted the hook out of the mouth of a speckled perch. "H-e-m! a leader among your companions, I allow; a sort o' spotted politician, mayhap, but ye got the graft in yer gills once too often. Ye've been in some sort o' rascally business, and ye'r spots won't wash out—a sort o' Lady Macbeth, lackin' the pettycoats. Ye'r sides are sleek an' ye'r fins are sharp, an' ye'r built for gettin' thar; but, ha! ha! ha! ye'r landed! ye'r landed! The slippery sinners 'll sometimes get caught on the gospill hook—sometimes! Now there was Bunyan, and there was Luther, and there was Jerry McAuley, and there was—"

The line fairly whizzed through the air and a poor little "shiner" shot aloft and whirled like a leaf of the quaking-ash, and tearing itself from the hook, disappeared in the water.

"Gone b'gosh! Just like some sinners I know of. We throw out the line o' invitation. They parley, they trifle, they nibble at the truth, whisk around and come back an' go to dawdlin' again. Smell at it, peck at it, taste of it, wink and blink and work their gills, then, maybe, take the bait o' truth in the aidge o' their triflin' jaws, stid o' takin' a good square holt and holdin' on. We pull, as in good grace we are bound to do; and about the time we think we got 'em landed on the shores o' the kingdom they wriggle off the hook and drop back again into worldliness. It's the

natural result o' too much nibblin'. Don't nibble, young man. Bite, lay holt. Get a good square grip; clap ye'r maxillaries right down on the truth, snap ye'r teeth into it, and, my eye! but ye'll get thar.

"There, see that? See that, young man?" A glistening bream hung whirling from the line's end like a plummet of silver. The old parson threw it at his feet where it flopped around and danced a minuet on nose and tail and beat time on the dry planks much to the disgust of the reverend father.

"He conducts himself like one o' the vain fellows," sneered the old fisherman. "A society scapegrace, without doubt. Probably belongs to the high Church, and thinks 'cause this isn't Lent it don't make no difference what's doin'. Upper crust, 'thout a doubt; one o' the godless 300! O yes," he rambled on as he twisted a shrimp onto his hook and flung it hissing onto the water, "I've seen lots o' sinners jus' like that shameless bream. Get 'em into the church and they won't be still a minute. They want to dance, or play eucher, or fool with the fiddle, or run to the godless the-a-ter and keep the young folks in perpetual hot water, an' hot water haint no part o' the Baptis' constitution an' by-laws. The preacher has to run his dear laigs off keepin' them in line. Admonition has no more effect on 'em than a shower bath on a 'gator. An' prayer meetin'? Ye couldn't keep 'em in there 'cept ye

tie 'em to a pillar, lock the door an' have their vittles fotched to 'em. An' then, ten to one, they'd pull the staple out and get away, specially if they is Baptis's. What that sort needs is sustainin' grace to—

"Oh, there now! Tubs and firkins, what a shame!" And he pulled out a fish no larger than a slice of a potato. "Poor thing! Here, you: go right back into the water! Stay there and don't be meddlin' again with temptation. And that reminds me o' the little folks in this all-around work o' the kingdom. They, too, get caught on the gospill hook. And, indeed, I think it seasonable and scripturally reasonable that the kids should be trained up in the sanctuary with suitable pastoral supervision and admonitory oversight. The little minnows need angle-worms as well as the big, green-eyed, envious bass. But for all that I don't encourage 'em joinin' the church too young—*too* young, mind you. I've had to throw 'em back into the water to let 'em grow a bit. Feed 'em on the catechism and gristle and see that they be a digestin' the nutriment. Catechism, like homeopathy, is good for children. They should tackle it with a realizin' sense an' not take the hook in their gills 'thout considerin'. Like fishes they are best when not caught too young. But *how* young? Now that is a question. Children, like these piscatorial nibblers, differ; and home training is a provender that you've got to figger on. But I must say as

how home trainin' don't put much hair on the hide these times, beggin' yer pardon, young man, for mixin' the figger.

"Sakes alive!" ejaculated the good man, with that prodigal abandon of speech so characteristic of those who angle in many waters. "What'n the name o' Jordan's stormy banks has got onto that hook? See it! See it! I'd jus' like to know! Such lawlessness and irregularity o' procedure I never see since we ejeckted Brother Shamokin from the conference for contumacy. Yes, an' for usin' langwidge that wouldn't weigh sixteen ounces to the pound. He wa'n't even up to the Baptis's low water mark. How that creetur pulls! I bet you a Rous's version 'gain a pair overalls it's a 'gator!"

He tried to land it; but the rod sprang into a hoop with no result. The denizen of the deep held its own. The parson swung his pole hither and yon and the line sung through the water like a thread in the window when the winds are up. But the catch floundered about as if it was not particularly concerned about the movements on the pier. It would not "play" according to any recognized authority. In that event the good father would have gone by the "book." There seemed to be nothing in the "Standards" to meet the case. The "higher critics" were silent on landing a thing like that. They were better at "diggin' for grubs than for catchin' fish. They know all about the whale and the size o' his thrap-

ple, but when it comes to helpin' ole Baptis' preachers catch sinners or suckers they'r off burrowin' in the sand like woodchucks. They'r down-pullin' 'stead o' up-buildin'."

"Better let him go, parson," suggested Gyp.

"What? And lose a two-dollar-and-a-half pole, line, bobber and hook? Boy, I'm an old Baptis' preacher, but I hain't no ejit. There's sumthin' down thar; an' it's allus bigger when you can't see it. That fish may be a little Antinomian, or like some o' them Methodisses who pull on the gospel hook 'thout shettin' their mouths: jes up an' holler an' pull on the line an' work their gills an' wag for more. Cayn't blame 'em, howsomever, if they're gettin' the genooine bait. The more ye get the fatter ye is. But this here contumachus sinner'll know more when I land him plump on the dock."

The venerable divine felt himself without "precedent." No twist of the pole would bring up that denizen of the deep.

"This is abnormal; it is unprecedented, and I must do as I am led." With that the old man dropped the pole on the planks, laid hold of the line with his two clerical hands and pulled for dear life. But the catch dragged like a stone at the bottom. Then he turned with his back to the water and drew the line over his shoulder, as if drawing a load of wood up hill. When he had drawn his fish to the side of the pier he turned about, wrapped the line about his hands and

pulled straight up. He was doing "as he was led," when the line caught in a crack in one of the planks and suddenly snapped. The parson turned a back somersault and fell into the water on the opposite side of the pier.

"By heck!" he sputtered, as he flung the water out of his nose and eyes.

Gyp ran to his help, but the old fisherman emerged from his cool bath and floated ashore, sputtering like a seal, with his hair in his eyes and his beard in ropes and his thin trousers clinging to his limbs like wet paper to the palings after a storm.

"Young man!" he puffed and snorted as he climbed up the bank, dripping like a merino in sheep-washing. "Young man, come here! Bear me witness; y' see I'm ashore, and I havn't made one untoward or infelicitous observation; not one to which you could fix an exclamation point, 'cept 'by heck!' an' 'by heck!' 's orthodox Baptis' for dammit. Many a man in my predicament would have blurted out things unmailable and unspellable. He would have used language for all that was in it. He would have thrown off the brakes regardless of the stress on the britchen and let her go. But here I stand a soggy monyment to the integrity o' the ministry and the Third C'mandment."

"Can I be of any help to you, parson?" Gyp solicitously inquired. "Hadn't we better drive to a near-by house where you may be able to make

some changes in your raiment?" but for the life of him he could scarcely keep back the tears of laughter. It hurt his side so that he was afraid his wound would break out afresh.

"What, go away and lose that fish? I'm a Baptis' and a sticker. I'll trust the Lord and keep these britches on till that thing's landed. I speak as in a figger and not after the manner of my seck."

His clothing stuck to him as if it had been glued there, yet he seized the broken end of the line which still stuck in the plank and with a little more caution began to draw up, as one would draw a bucket out of a well, hand under hand. The first thing he saw was a great mouth coming up out of the water, then a couple of flexible horns and two glistening eyes that shone above the encircling ripples. Parson Watchcob's blood began to creep, his hat fell into the water, but he kept on pulling. Then he saw a long, dark, slippery, rubber-like back with the color shading into satiny white on the belly.

"Shades of Jonah and the whale! It's a cat! a measly, pharisaical catfish!"

He flung it on the pier; and the great, gruesome creature writhed and yawned and twisted its exorbitant mouth, worked its flexible horns and stared at the preacher with glassy eyes, as if to say: "I'd just like to get a good hold of you for a minute!"

But the old divine looked down upon his victim

as if ashamed to have wasted on it so much physical energy and unprofitable speculation, to say nothing of a good orthodox immersion. Then he tied his broken line, baited his hook, threw it on the water and blurted:

"It's often the misfortune o' the minister o' the gospill to be taken in with a thing like that! That groveling cat looks and acts for all the world like a dastard infidel. They're always tryin' to get the preachers into deep water, and, dodgastem, they sometimes succeed! But we land 'em at last, once the hook is in their jaws. Regular agnostic, he is! Look at his mouth. I never see so much capacity put to so poor a use. Wouldn't that make the ordinary infidel green with envy and kindle the fires o' jealousy in the soul of a higher critic? What magnificent resources goin' to waste. Agnostic through and through or my diagnose fails. These critters sometimes mingle with more wholesome fishes, as infidels with better folk. But who eats a catfish? Who loves a catfish? Who writes sonnets to a catfish? Nay, verily. As the catfish among the fishes, so is the infidel among the sons of men."

With that he reeled up his line, the disgust plainly showing in his countenance.

"Come on, young man. Even a Baptis' knows when he's had enough o' water. Come along home."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ON THE SEA WALL

AIDA and Gyp, their hospital days happily over, stood upon the sea wall. The moon rose out of the deep and silvered the watery east. Old ocean glistened like a plain of isinglass. Across the shimmering desert of water a boulevard of light ran from the moon's disk to the grey spit of sand on the glimmering beach, climbed the long comb of dunes and lost itself in the marsh-green of Anastasia. Falling upon the Matanzas the moon-ribbon bound the sea-wall where the lovers stood to the soft lunar placque that shone so benign and far away. The thin blade of the island alone severed the path of glory which joined these far-flung terminals.

"The dream! The dream!" exclaimed Gyp enthusiastically, as he pointed his index finger toward the sea.

"What dream?" Aida inquired, as she looked into his animated face.

"The dream that helped me solve the riddle."

"Now, dear, you are talking in riddles."

"Bless you, darling, I had forgotten. Did you ever hear of a mysterious little problem prepared by two sweet young ladies and given to an unso-

phisticated mountaineer away out yonder in the land of the sky?"

"A problem? Two young ladies? Off in the mountains?" she responded in a trinity of interrogations and a sweet assumption of ignorance.

"Yep!" laughed Gyp, lapsing into his native vernacular.

"Young ladies! a dream! I know nothing of any dream."

"It is this way: Two very interesting gentle folk gave me a geographical problem, and before I solved it I had a dream, and the beautiful vision which I saw in my dream was the same that lies before us here to-night."

"Oh, tell me about it! Do. You excite my curiosity."

"Look at the scene and you behold the dream. There is one thing different."

"And what is that?"

"I wasn't in the dream; but I'm here."

"The mystery deepens."

"And the young lady of the vision was the fairest I ever saw."

"Now I'm going to be jealous."

"There is the river—just as I saw it in my dream; yonder looms the lighthouse; here are the ships, the island and the light foam tumbling on the beach. Oh, it's the same scene, Aida, dear, the same scene! It's the dream, the dream!" and he clapped his hands exultingly.

"You seem to be having a splendid good time with it, all to yourself," laughed the merry-hearted girl. "Won't you be kind enough to unwind your spool a little for the sake of your precious ignoramus?"

"I'm unraveling, darling, and I think you understand how to wind up the yarn pretty well. Listen: I saw tall palmettoes, and here they are; I beheld long Spanish mosses swaying in the winds like old men's beards, and there on the trees are the mosses, my dear."

"And I'm likely to be moss-grown before I am much wiser," and her rollicking laugh was contagious. But Gyp resisted the infection and went right on:

"I heard mocking-birds sing, as we heard them to-day, sweet and rhythmical as your own happy voice. And I saw on all sides rare and beautiful flowers, well-dressed people with bright smiles and happy faces, and best of all, I saw a radiant maiden—"

"Yes, I heard that a moment ago. You see now I *am* jealous," and she gave his arm a suggestive squeeze just to let him know that she did not mean a word of it. "Can't you tell me about her?"

"My vocabulary is not equal to the occasion or the subject. She was an exquisite creature, and she looked toward the east, just as we are looking now. The ships stood upon the sea, just as

they stand now. The island lay blank across my vision, just as it lies now. It's all there, my dear one! The young lady was robed in spotless white, just as she is robed now. Her throat and fingers flashed with jewels, just as they flash now. Her face was fair and sweet as the face of an angel, just as it is now, with a bit of the blush of the sunrise in it."

"Oh, Gyp, I can't stand this. No wonder her cheeks were red, as mine are now. Listen to me. I have a thousand things to tell you before you go farther."

"Wait, darling," and he stooped and kissed the sunrise blush on her cheek, then, with anointed lips he went right on:

"And this lovely creature looked upon the river so sweetly that the river was charmed; and in my dream I heard her say:—"

"What did you hear her say?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing?"

"I mean she got no whither with her speech."

"A most entertaining female, surely."

"But she led me on a most delightful quest."

"I'm listening."

"This, beloved, is what she said: 'As these rivers unite and flow to the sea, so shall the lives of Gyp Stybright—'"

"Oh, go on; go on. I'm wonderfully interested."

"That's all. She got no farther. You see I

awoke, and awaking spoiled the vision. Now I'm waiting for her to finish the sentence!"

"Oh, what a sweet, old, tantalizing fellow you are!"

"The dream was heaven to me; and I am now waiting for the angel to swing the doors ajar and let me in."

"Gyp, dear, that's magnificent. I have never been so near the celestial gates in my life as just right now. But I must explain things before I let you go any farther."

"What things?"

"Things that lie between our parting on the mountains and our meeting here."

"Let the dead past bury its dead."

"It cannot. Only the living can bury the dead. But this is neither death, funeral nor epitaph for either of us."

"No, darling. It is a resurrection. Therefore let the old years go. Whatever you did was right. Whatever you failed to do was right, and that's the end on't. Let me ask, what of that conundrum about the rivers?"

"Oh, that artless riddle about finding the city between the rivers and you would find happiness? That was but a bit of girl fun to introduce the subject nearest your heart and mine."

"But if I had failed?"

"But you did not."

"Now, you darling girl, tell me," and he took both her hands in his, "shall the prophesy of the

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rivers come true? You know they ran together to the sea. Shall the rivers typify our lives?"

"How can I tell, you precious boy! I can only hope, can you?"

And that night they started down the way of the rivers.





